## POSITION PAPER 2023







"Key competences for all: a lifelong learning approach" December 2023

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In addition, it reflects LLLP members' concerns throughout some months of consultations. LLLP designs its positions through different activities, but it also relies on the expertise of partner and member organisations with special knowledge on the topic. We would like to thank the participants listed below who contributed with their views to a series of focus groups in May 2023:

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Disclaimer: The term key competences is used in this position paper to mean competences which all individuals need for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, sustainable lifestyle, successful life in peaceful societies, health-conscious life management and active citizenship. They are developed in a lifelong learning perspective, from early childhood throughout adult life, and through formal, non-formal and informal learning in all contexts, including family, school, workplace, neighbourhood and other communities. For this and other definitions, you can consult the LLLGlossary <u>here</u>.



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### RECOMMENDATIONS

**Education is everyone's responsibility.** Ensure a whole-of-government and multi-stakeholder approach to competence development, by creating lifelong learning strategies at EU, national and regional/local levels. Education is a transversal and cross-cutting part of society for which all stakeholders are responsible and must work in collaboration.

Skills revolutions are not enough, we demand a competences revolution! Promote the uptake of the EU competence frameworks and ensure the mainstreaming of the knowledge-skill-attitude triad as the approach towards learning objectives. Moreover, adapt the general goals of learning towards competence-development rather than skills acquisition, and guide learners' journey in a lifelong learning manner, where all learning environments are considered of equal value. Skill acquisition merely promotes short-termism and quick fixes, while competences are the ones which holistically promote personal development and ensure learners are ready for all challenges.

Assessments as a learning tool and not a career test: Reform assessment in education and training with increased emphasis on the the formative perspective. Use the feedback looping process as a way to advance competence development, rather than create rankings or credentials for accessing further levels of learning and/or employment. Formative and summative assessment should be used in full complementarity. An assessment revolution is required to elevate key and transversal competences as the main outcome of the learning process.

No progress without validation. Improve the implementation of the validation and recognition of non-formal and informal learning, as well as prior learning across the EU Member States. Enlarge the focus of the validation and recognition of competences towards transversal competences. Improve already existing guidelines and strategic frameworks at both European and national levels, to facilitate the integration of transversal competences into validation and recognition practices. Without validation, key and transversal competences cannot be approached systematically, through all learning environments and in a way that invites reflection and further development.

Learners must be at the centre - the importance of self-regulated learning. Promote a transformative approach to learning where educators act as catalysts for experimentation in learning rather than being repositories of knowledge. Foster the development of self-regulation competences in learners, empowering them to thrive in a learner-focused setting. Key and transversal competence acquisition requires active participation of learners, since initiative and participatory learning actions are central to key and transversal competences. Self-regulation aids the communication of learners' needs, contributing to tailored learning that can prioritise specific key and transversal competences.

All for the learning journey and a learning journey for all! Commit to enhance the flexibility of the learning journey, including through learning provision, validation and recognition of learning and guidance across the learning path. This includes the implementation of measures such as micro-credentials, Individual Learning Accounts, guidance within validation processes, flexibilisation of access to different learning pathways, funding to pursue learning. By adapting the learning journey to learners' needs they are more inclined to continue learning throughout their entire life and constantly update their key and transversal competences. Moreover, tailored learning opportunities better develop key and transversal competences of learners by using their strengths and creating safe learning environments.

Breaking silos to promote key and transversal competences. Foster and strengthen partnerships and collaboration between all stakeholders in education and training, including civil society, crossing over from the whole-school approach to a whole-community approach that enables diverse, accessible and tailored learning journeys for all. If the learning system is not treated as a whole, with sectors seen as silos, key and transversal competences will not be connected across and developed at different stages of one's life.

Back your promises with action - Investment for political commitments!

Dedicate adequate, structural and sustainable public funding to lifelong funding to lifelong learning, for a comprehensive reform enabling the shift from a knowledge-based learning system to a competence-based learning system. Effective implementation of whole-community models for competence development across European regions, irrespective of socio-economic status, need comprehensive funding, combining national and EU funds to link all strands and programmes for education and training.

### INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly complex world with arising Following up on the momentous creation interconnected challenges, recognising the of the European Pillar of Social Rights, with competences necessary for thriving lives its first principle establishing a universal is more crucial than ever. The idea of key right to education, training and lifelong competences has been discussed within learning, the EYS felt like another brick to the EU since the turn of the millennium, the foundation laid for reviving a strong but much of the value-based discussions. European welfare state. In the aftermath of and agreements were not successfully the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent translated into practice in terms of learning austerity, the social policies elaborated at approaches across the EU. Therefore, the EU level have been an encouragement. Lifelong Learning Platform (henceforth

surprise to many, was widely welcomed by Europeans' competences.

LLLP) spotlights key competences in 2023. However, this excitement for the EYS is misplaced. 1996 was the first European Year LLLP's work on the topic coincided with to focus on education and training with a the launch of the 2023 European Year lifelong learning approach and was called of Skills (EYS). The EYS, despite being a the European Year of Lifelong Learning. The decision linked educational levels, all stakeholders. It was about time to put broadened participation in decision-making the emphasis on education and training at on learning to families and social partners, EU level and rightly so after the COVID-19 and aimed to boost learners' motivation, pandemic which spotlighted already breaking silos in education and training. existing gaps in competences, prompting EU 27 years after this landmark moment, the institutions and Member States' leadership vision of lifelong learning regressed from to turn their attention towards developing an all-encompassing one towards one narrowed down to skills for the labour market. The EYS Decision welcomes any EU and Member States pick up on their competence development action, yet it commitments to build a lifelong learning clearly emphasises the need to solve the strategy which develops all types of labour market emergency that the EU competences needed for flourishing in experiences: train a set amount of adults current societies, and starts from ensuring to fill in gaps in key sectors such as IT, that all learners have the basic level of construction and energy. This comes at a time such competences. The Paper is split when the 2018 Council Recommendation into four chapters, each with a dedicated on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning layer characteristic of a systemic thinking has been neglected. This recommendation, which focused on holistically developing learners for active participation in society, competences' concept, the second chapter becomes useless if coordinated action is not taken for its implementation and if investment is not allocated towards achieving its objectives, leading to missing out on the opportunity to ensure a holistic vision to lifelong learning.

This annual Position Paper aims to highlight the relevance of key competences for the implementation of recent learning policies, despite having been neglected in the past years. The goal is to present a vision for policy reforms to ensure that the

approach: from meta, macro, meso to micro levels. The first one clarifies the 'key explores the idea of a whole-of-government approach, and the third chapter zooms in to learning providers. The Paper concludes with a chapter focused on learners, and the actions they need to undertake to foster key competences development.

## UNDERSTAND TERMINOLOGY:

**MAKING SENSE OF THE 'SKILLS VS COMPETENCES' DEBATE** 

Key competences form a fundamental domain. toolkit of knowledge, skills and attitudes capabilities which facilitate human flourishing across effectively apply knowledge in real-world various dimensions—personal, professional, contexts. "Attitudes" capture the mental social, and political. In accordance with and emotional dispositions that influence this broader perspective, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU instituted a seminal *Recommendation* in 2006. It exhorted Member States to incorporate a set of vital competences and wellbeing is part of digital safety within their lifelong learning strategies. This was a foundational step to recognise the being aware of symptoms of digital importance of key competences for both individual and collective wellbeing and give impetus to the development of lifelong learning strategies at national level.

However, it was the 2018 *Council* (establishing screen-free times, installing Recommendation on Key Competences for software limiting time, filtering content). Lifelong Learning that expanded and refined The requisite attitude encompasses a these ideas, aligning with contemporary challenges and opportunities. The Recommendation emphasised not just skill acquisition for labour market participation key competences considered essential: but also for full participation in society, Literacy; Multilingualism; Mathematical aligning with a vision towards a European Education Area<sup>2</sup> focused on harnessing Digital Competence; Personal and Social the potential of education and culture as catalysts for social fairness, active citizenship and employment, achieved through formal, non-formal and informal learning.

The Council Recommendation (CR) offers a comprehensive definition of mere articulation is insufficient; effective competences, conceptualising them as a knowledge, skills knowledge, skills, and attitudes triad. "Knowledge" encompasses factual data, theoretical constructs, and conceptual insights underpinning an individual's understanding of a particular

"Skills" are allowing individuals to engagement with ideas, individuals, and various situations<sup>3</sup>.

example. safeguarding competence. Knowledge-wise, this entails addiction (loss of control, withdrawal signs, mood irregularities) and understanding its consequences. A skill integral to this is the implementation of strategies to monitor and restrict digital usage predisposition to prioritise physical and mental wellbeing<sup>4</sup>. Building on this tripartite conceptualisation, the CR enumerates eight Science, Technology and Engineering: Skills; Active Citizenship; Entrepreneurship; and Cultural Awareness and Expression.

While the establishment of guidelines for key competences is laudable, experience with policy-making underscores that implementation is crucial. Therefore, the EU developed Competence frameworks to build a shared understanding of key competences and facilitate their introduction in education and training curricula<sup>5</sup>. **However,** despite this comprehensive EU approach

<sup>1</sup> Council of the European Union (2018). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, here.

<sup>2</sup> Achieving a European Education Area by 2025 and resetting education and training for the digital age, here.

<sup>3</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). LLLGlossary: Review of Lifelong Learning Terminology, here.

<sup>4</sup> European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Brande, L., Carretero, S., Vuorikari, R. et al., (2016). DigComp 2.0 - The digital competence framework for citizens, here.

<sup>5</sup> Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S. and Punie, Y., (2022). DigComp 2.2: The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens - With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes, here; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis, P., Punie, Y. et al., (2016). EntreComp - The entrepreneurship competence framework, here; European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Sala, A., Herrero Rámila, C., (2022). LifeComp into action - Teaching life skills in the classroom and beyond, here; Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2022). GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), here.

acknowledgement that the terminology to perform specific duties or tasks"8. and what exactly accounts for key competences are contested across focuses "on the technical skills needed countries, languages, and contexts. Discussing with a variety of experts through focus groups, certain skills, connected to competences, were singled out and aligned closely with those articulated in existing frameworks. These essential skills - critical thinkina. problem-solving, teamwork, communication, initiative, and motivation - are categorised under the umbrella term "transversal skills". While some advocated for flexibility in defining key competences. others underscored the need for establishing common, globally-accepted definitions.

#### How are institutions defining transversal skills?

UNESCO understands transversal skills as of personal development, as transversal and those "that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge An exclusive emphasis on specialised and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings"<sup>6</sup>. ESCO defines "transversal skills and competences" as "learned and proven abilities which are commonly seen as necessary or valuable for effective action in virtually any kind of work, learning or life activity" 7, while noting that interpretations vary. Even without clear definitions, the willingness to discuss skills is common. However, recently, there was a shift in policy actions on key competences, towards the enhancement of technical skills, defined as "specialised

to key competences, there must be an skills, knowledge or know-how needed According to ILO, the education system to perform specific tasks, because this approach is simpler, less expensive and easier to train a greater number in a shorter period of time"9. This fails to recognise that transversal skills support learners in all learning environments and stages of life. The Skills Agenda reflects this narrow focus, concentrating on upskilling and reskilling for labour markets, placing emphasis on VET to alleviate labour shortages and stressing green, digital, and entrepreneurial skills.

> Nevertheless. "competences for the 21st century are not only digital or technical in nature but encompass learning to learn as a competence in its own right and other "life skills" which support individuals' resilience and participation in wider society"10. Therefore, one cannot lose focus technical skills are equally crucial and their development calls for a holistic approach. skills neglects the full spectrum of human potential that contributes to personal and societal wellbeing. Such a narrow focus compromises the cultivation of healthy relationships, effective parenting, and the attention to individual mental and physical health as well as active involvement in community affairs and governance. Moreover, in a world that is increasingly interconnected this approach overlooks the necessity of engaging with others in an ethical and equitable manner. However, the EU's comprehensive terminological

of its policies. Although the 2018 CR on Key Competences for lifelong learning provides a solid framework, terms like skills and Firstly, it disregards the fact that training competences are used interchangeably, often downplaying competences as defined in EU competence frameworks as knowledge-skills-attitudes<sup>11</sup>, it can be noted in the development of certain policies, such as Upskilling Pathways<sup>12</sup> and its update in 2019<sup>13</sup>, that little to no reference to transversal skills or its synonyms was made. The same applies to the European Green Deal<sup>14</sup>, European Education Area<sup>15</sup>, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan<sup>16</sup> or the CR on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality<sup>17</sup>. where key competences, if mentioned, are always related to labour market<sup>18</sup>. Finally, the clearest example of this trend can be found in the 2016 European Skills Agenda and its 2020 update. It outlines a five-year strategy aimed at enabling "individuals and businesses to develop more and better skills and to put them to use"19.

The **European Year of Skills** has sharpened the focus on technical skills<sup>20</sup>, particularly in the digital and green sectors, adhering to market-oriented logic that prepares for existing and emerging workforce scarcities. Consequently, this is a missed opportunity to revisit and reassess prevailing approaches to competences, which are essential for societal resilience in both professional and personal spheres. This short-sighted

understanding diverges from the trajectory perspective errs in three fundamental

individuals for specialised roles exposes them to the whims of an ever-changing iob market characterised by inequity and limited access to opportunities. Acquiring only technical skills can hamper one's adaptability within and across sectors when multiple studies affirm the greater importance of transversal skills across a range of jobs and sectors<sup>2122</sup>. Focusing solely on technical skills without considering transversal competences, such as the ability to learn, is counterproductive since these competences are key to mastering technical skills. Secondly, the emphasis on specific job-related skills fails to recognise human **complexity**, specifically how learners grow as active participants in their community and through social activism, within families, through personal interests, within cultural landscapes. Thirdly, learning processes cannot be reduced to green or digital **skills.** Such skills do not operate in a vacuum. seeing how digital and green transitions are not only labour market trends but societal transformations and, as such, they require a broader set of competences.

The Position Paper uses 'key and transversal **competences'** when referring to the vision of competences it aims to promote. The following chapters provide reforms for a competence-oriented learning system.

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO-UNEVOC. TVETipedia Glossary. Transversal skills, here.

<sup>7</sup> ESCO publications (2022). Towards a structured and consistent terminology on transversal skills and competences, here.

<sup>8</sup> Brewer, L. (2013), Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? and How? Guide to core work skills. International Labour Organization,

<sup>9</sup> Brewer, L. (2013), Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? and How? Guide to core work skills. International Labour Organization,

<sup>10</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), here.

<sup>11</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, here.

<sup>12</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2016). Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults,

<sup>13</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2019). Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, here.

<sup>14</sup> European Commission (2019). COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION The European Green Deal, here.

<sup>15</sup> European Parliamentary Research Service (2020). AT A GLANCE European education area, here.

<sup>16</sup> European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2021). The European pillar of social rights action plan, here.

<sup>17</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2022). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, *here*.

<sup>18</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, here.

<sup>19</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2021). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on blended learning approaches for high-quality and inclusive primary and secondary education, here.

<sup>20</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2023). The European Year of Skills: an opportunity for Europe to look at skills beyond the labour market? (Reaction), here.

<sup>21</sup> Sridharan, B., Muttakin, M. B., & Mihret, D. G. (2018). Students' perceptions of peer assessment effectiveness: an explorative study. Accounting Education, 27(3), 259-285, here.

<sup>22</sup> Reining, N., & Kauffeld, S. (2022). Empirical Findings on Learning Success and Competence Development at Learning Factories: A Scoping Review, here.

## RETHINKING OUR SYSTEM

## Whole-of-government as enabling factor for

## key competences development

EU institutions and Member States recognise the importance of working together across ministries as a key enabling factor for policy development, implementation, monitoring and evaluation. This is visible in the digital education package released in April 2023: two proposals for Council Recommendations focused on digital education and skills<sup>23</sup>. Within this package, a whole-of-government approach is understood as the "collaboration between the different public bodies that extends beyond their respective fields of competence with a view to providing the public with a combined response from a single body"24. Policies in the EU are often unconnected at sectoral and territorial levels, failing to be comprehensive enough to tackle systemic challenges, such as key and transversal competences mainstreaming. The disconnectedness is present in different policy areas, with environmental policy being one of the first examples; showing how multiple policy portfolios need to cooperate for

meaningful change<sup>25</sup>.

Education and training policies also require a collaborative mindset across and between government levels. For example. the implementation of policy reforms to improve teachers' working conditions or the introduction of in-class digital tools cannot promote a holistic development of competences for all without the collaborative mindset. LLLP has been demanding wholeof-government approaches since its foundation, in 2005, but also in its recent papers such as its Statement on the Future of Learning and its *Position Paper* on 21st Century Learning Environments. The aforementioned Council Recommendations use digital technologies as illustration: authorities responsible for infrastructure and connectivity, financial resources for appropriate implementation, educational staff to develop age-appropriate curricula and support educators. This horizontal collaboration and coordination must happen parallel to the vertical work, especially in Member States with regional or local autonomy to avoid duplication or disconnected sectoral strategies.

More attention needs to be given to the regional and local level, as the understanding of the whole-of-government approach must not be limited solely to national level ministries. The devolved competences in

<sup>23</sup> European Commission (2023). Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training, *here*; European Commission (2023). Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training, *here*; European Commission (2023). Staff Working Document Accompanying Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training and Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training, *here*.

<sup>24</sup> European Commission (2021). Knowledge for Policy. Glossary, Whole-of-government approach, <u>here</u>.

<sup>25</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, here.

States must be considered, but besides on the forefront of lifelong learning **implementation**. The Communication in Harnessing Talent in EU Regions has recognised the importance of collaborations beyond national governments, tailoring approaches based on regional challenges and specificities. The *Communication* in Harnessing Talent in EU Regions has beyond national governments, tailoring approaches based on regional challenges and specificities. This must be expanded within the relevant educational policies as well, such as EEA or Skills Agenda, insisting that policymakers already have examples Good practices on whole-of-government of successful practices and evidencebased *policy recommendations* such as those stemming from the *Collaborative* Monitoring of REgional Lifelong learning Policies (COMORELP) project. The project promoted the practice of regional policy labs to boost inter-regional collaboration. leading to piloting in Poland, Italy, the UK, Turkey, and France and a benchmarking tool to streamline this policy making approach.

Nationally, efforts for operationalising this occurred when Member States nominated representatives for the Commission's structured dialogue on digital education and skills, in which different areas were

education and training across Member represented such as education, labour, digital industry and finance, ensuring this, there must be an awareness that the development of policies based on the regional and local authorities are expertise from a variety of sectors. A key ingredient in this horizontal and vertical collaboration and coordination is the work with civil society<sup>26</sup>. In this position paper, a whole-of-government approach invariably includes multi-stakeholder approaches. This cooperation in the development, update, implementation and monitoring of policies must be continuous, transparent, recognised the importance of collaborations meaningful and comprehensive. Adequate spaces for dialogue and joint work must be created to ingrain this collaborative mindset at different governmental levels to avoid silo structures or overlaps.

> approaches should also be adopted by the EU to avoid multiple EU strategies and policy documents relating to education and skills and simplify the challenging work of implementation, monitoring and evaluation. The Structured Dialogue on Digital Education and Skills could serve as inspiration, potentially even helping unite the work of Commission departments under guidance from a Commissioner for Lifelong Learning. It is inconceivable to develop, implement and monitor the Skills Agenda by only involving employment ministers or the European Education Area (EEA) by only involving education ones.<sup>27</sup>

LLLP and its member organisations advocate for the Year of Skills to lead to outcomes which have a broader vision that promotes key competences and brings impetus to implementing whole-ofgovernment approaches on education and training. By introducing this at different levels, the work on key competences is not limited to one department but enriched and supported by the collaboration across different education and training stakeholders. Key and transversal competences are necessary for effective action in virtually any kind of life, learning or work activity, therefore, they are not exclusively related to any particular context (job, academic discipline, civic engagement, occupational sector, etc.). Hence, having a solely labour market focus hinders supporting their development and precludes wider systemic collaboration like the whole-of-government approaches.

#### **Key competences:**

#### a broader barometer for achievement in education and training

One of the main benefits of implementing the whole-of-government approach and transforming education systems into ones where cross-departmental cooperation is the norm would be expanding priorities for learning to encompass a wider perspective which includes wellbeing, sustainability and active citizenship alongside labour market participation. An indication in favour of this wider perspective is the place that key and transversal competences started to occupy even with stakeholders that traditionally had a sector specific mindset over skills.

While technical digital and green skills gained momentum due to societal and environmental transformation, key and transversal competences have also been portrayed as essential to navigate work and life successfully, contributing to learners' personal development and wellbeing. Taking on board these perspectives - personal fulfilment, development throughout life and active citizenship - makes apparent the central role of key competences for lifelong learning and the need to be prioritised by policy makers when determining what is achievement in education and training; a call LLLP has been making for the last two decades.29

Even when referring solely to skills, transversal skills go beyond sector-specific

Without these two and other sectors joining forces, policies fall short of achieving ambitious and needed goals. As explained in the European Policy Coherence Report from the TRANSVAL-EU project, national skills strategies with a whole-ofgovernment approach "are key to ensuring a holistic approach to adult learning, encompassing not only education and training and employment, but also aligned across all relevant policy fields, such as regional development, social inclusion and migration". However, a very limited number of EU countries took action after 2020 for developing national skills strategies in this  $way^{28}$ .

<sup>26</sup> European Commission (2023). Staff Working Document Accompanying the documents Proposal for a Council Recommendation on the key enabling factors for successful digital education and training Proposal for a Council Recommendation on improving the provision of digital skills in education and training, *here*.

<sup>27</sup> The current siloing structure of education and training within the European Commission is detrimental to a whole-of-government approach, to concerted actions, and ultimately to policy coherence. Part of this is rooted in how skills are seen as an employment prerogative alone.

<sup>28</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, here.

<sup>29</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2004). Developing basic skills as key competences. A guide to good practice (European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning), here.

the Art report<sup>31</sup> underlines how transversal skills and competences are needed both for the twin transitions, but just as importantly for each person's participation in society (personal development, active citizenship) in balance with nature (sustainability). Experts in LLLP focus groups recognised that while transversality of skills and competences contributes to terminological overlap, these different understandings of competences and skills, across languages and realities make whole-of-government However, most available data continues approaches even more important for current and future policies to become enriched and more comprehensive. Recent research in nurturing attitudes that should be showed that calls to balance support for key and transversal competences alongside sector specific skills come even from employment representatives. A study found social and environmental policies, adequate that UK employers are likelier to focus on candidates capable of demonstrating jobspecific skills as well as generic soft skills<sup>32</sup> (i.e. components of key and transversal competences can be acquired. competences).

At EU level, the *Cedefop* Skills Panorama offers a good picture in terms of soughtafter skills based on analysis of job advertisements across Member States. showing the need for adults to develop transversal skills and competences<sup>33</sup>. A report by the McKinsey Global Institute<sup>34</sup> estimates that demand among employers for "social and emotional skills" such as

skills<sup>30</sup>. The TRANSVAL-EU project's State of negotiation, leadership and initiative-taking, will rise in Europe by 22% by 2030. So will the demand for "higher cognitive skills," which include creativity (39% increase). The evidence strongly supports an approach to competence development geared towards helping learners navigate and adapt to the rapid changing trends and challenges at global level: the development that must be supported from the beginning of and across the lifelong learning continuum.<sup>35</sup>

> to view transversal skills as separate from competences. This leads to a failure developed in parallel to transversal skills. Given the relevance of key competences beyond labour markets, for a wider range of policies for competence development imply having a comprehensive way of defining achievement in learning and how these

Discussing key competences and transversal skills depends on learning providers' diversity. As opposed to sector-specific skills needing some degree of formal or in-work development, transversal skills and competences are often acquired throughout lifelong and lifewide learning. ncluding environments outside the formal system such as the youth sector, work, volunteering and civil society<sup>3637</sup>. These

learning providers represent a diverse pool of target groups which cannot be tackled by developing policies within formal systems but only by having structures of collaboration with all stakeholders to guarantee a lifelong and lifewide perspective on learning and on achievement in learning.

Though strides have been made on key competences, the work around personal, social and learning to learn competences as well as citizenship lagged behind; with LifeComp<sup>38</sup> not receiving as much effort in implementation as DigComp and Green Comp since 2020. On the latter, it was encouraging to see how, through wide stakeholder consultations, sustainability competences were recognised beyond technical green skills for specific occupations towards transversal competences. This outcome was important as sustainability is a cross-sectoral and multidimensional area and can be tackled only through a combination of cognitive, applied and socioemotional competences developed in a lifelong and life-wide learning approach. 3940 Achieving sustainability requires not only skilled employees but well-rounded citizens if we want to truly achieve a fair and inclusive transition.41 This topic is linked with active citizenship competences, another example that touches upon

citizenship education, democracy remains an empty signifier. Developing citizenship competences "is a constant, neverending yet high-rewarding effort, which nurtures social cohesion and empowers active citizenship for better societies"42. and is required given current crises in our democratic systems.

Research on social and emotional skills<sup>43</sup> paints a negative picture of their development, with a decline in social and emotional skills for learners aged 10-15 years. Considering the vast body of research connecting socio-emotional skills with motivation, creativity and curiosity<sup>44</sup>, this is a sign that education systems are currently hindering the motivation to learn, creativity and curiosity when the opposite **should be the case**<sup>45</sup>**.** Drastic changes in not only how learning is provided but also on the raison d'être of education and training are needed. Learning is not a transactional enterprise where learners acquire specific skills for specific jobs, with results only being measured in cold numbers in terms of grades or labour market participation. Learning is a social-relational activity that has benefits beyond numerical calculations and policies should reflect that. Moreover, as experts in LLLP's focus groups highlighted, key competences are not something taught in a module: they are developed through learners' experiences and take time, which is why lifelong learning is so important.

policies around

every area of our lives. Without a cross-

sectoral approach to

<sup>30</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2015). Lifelong learning: Paving the way to learning and qualifications (Annual Conference), here.

<sup>31</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2021). Validation of transversal skills across Europe. European State of the Art Report, here.

<sup>32</sup> Phillip Brown & Manuel Souto-Otero (2020). The end of the credential society? An analysis of the relationship between education and the labour market using big data, Journal of Education Policy, here.

<sup>33</sup> Cedefop (2020). Skills in online job advertisements. Cedefop Skills intelligence, here.

<sup>34</sup> Bughin, J., Hazan, E., Lund, S., Dahlström, P., Wiesinger, A. & Subramaniam, A. (2018). Skill shift: Automation and the future of the workforce, McKinsey Global Institute, here.

<sup>35</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), here.

<sup>36</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2021). Validation of transversal skills across Europe. European State of the Art Report, here.

<sup>37</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), here.

<sup>38</sup> Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2020). LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, here.

<sup>39</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Environmental sustainability rhymes with lifelong learning, here.

<sup>40</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies (Position Paper), here.

<sup>41</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, here.

<sup>42</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). The education and training stakeholders' role in the Future of Europe - Reaching out to citizens deserves serious commitment, here.

<sup>43</sup> OECD (2021). OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, *here*.

<sup>45</sup> Lifelong Learning Interest Group (2021). Funding education for wellbeing (Report), here.

Conflating competences with skills is linked also with how funding for education and training is allocated. The European Semester's documents make clear the prevalence only of skills (a mere component of competences)46. The focus within the approaches Semester, the EU's economic governance framework, is labour market policies, failing The next step is leveraging the wholeto consider the importance of competences development and squandering calls of whole-of-government that the same EU institutions promote in other Council Recommendations. "Such indications from the [European Semester] restrict the possibility for [it] to expand indicators and formats of learning used beyond job specific learning, and the development of key competences for lifelong learning, such as the learning to learn competence".47



#### Unlocking reforms through whole-of-government

## and multi-stakeholder

of-government approach's in education policies, ensuring various strategies aimed at supporting learners at different stages of their lives are connected, mainstreaming competence development and providing due attention to different learning environments. The Commission monitor well-being in learning, the different launched separate initiatives such as Pathways to Schools Success, designed to support learning during formal schooling age and *Upskilling Pathways* aimed at helping learning in working age - including the Youth Guarantee for learners under 30. Upskilling Pathways recommends Member States to "create integrated upskilling pathways and open up learning communities, including by developing and reviewing whole-of-government national skills strategies".48 It also launched the Pact for Skills which operates on a multistakeholder approach, involving national, regional and local authorities, enterprises, social partners, education and training providers, among others. The challenge remains connecting all these policies in a continuum of lifelong learning.

Besides connecting policies aimed at different age groups, policymakers must ensure that policies are connecting formal, informal and non-formal learning environments and promote, in synergy, key and transversal competences. To showcase learning providers current gaps on this, Upskilling Pathways mentions, for example, transversal skills only in its Staff Working Document<sup>49</sup> despite them being foundations upon which other competences are built.

Pathways to School Success dedicates attention to learners' needs, but, mainly in primary and secondary education, when as explored before, key competences are developed in different learning environments.<sup>50</sup> Supporting learners with overarching strategies containing these substrategies dedicated to specific stages of their lives (across all learning environments) must also include the improvement of access to good-quality care and preschool programmes for children. Disregarding any environments or competence deepens skills gaps and inequalities in education and training.

#### Whole-of-government approaches:

Contributions from diverse

Learning providers from formal, non-formal and informal contexts are key actors in wholeof-government approaches for policies on key competences. Such approaches unlock systemic reforms in terms of professional development, supporting educators in developing their key competences and equipping them with methods to develop, value and assess learners' competences.



<sup>46</sup> TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, here. 47 Lifelong Learning Platform (2023). Status guo or a new age for social investment in Europe? (Reaction), here. 48 European Commission (2023). EVALUATION of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for adults, here.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

Training Model for education professionals on Assessment of Transversal Competences developed in long-term individual pupil mobility - EFIL

With the European Commission, EFIL developed a model for going beyond subject-based assessment of competences since this would not only benefit the learners' development but it would also contribute to finding out commonalities between different national education and training systems, effectively providing a basis for facilitating the automatic recognition of learning periods abroad. The Model can be found here and provides guidelines on organising mobility actions to boost transversal competences, assessing such competences and evaluating a mobility programme after its conclusion.

of decision making on key and transversal validation and guidance across education competences, especially for those operating and training policies, including skills in non-formal and informal environments. **strategies as part of them.** A whole-Their expertise can guarantee a wider of-government approach implies that understanding of learning achievement, methodologies for validating non-formal competence development and assessment, and informal learning are key pieces of especially as transversal competences policies developed for the education are harder to assess and, therefore, less ecosystem and not an afterthought recalled

Learning providers' voices must be part necessitate also a wide integration of visible than others. Such considerations only when learners go in job transitions.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### IMAGES (I Manage and Empower My Skills) project - SOLIDAR Foundation

The IMAGES project, an initiative with partners in four European countries, is dedicated to assisting leaders within the nonprofit third sector to pinpoint their existing skills and identify areas for growth, which in turn can advance their organisations and enable the mobility of their skill sets across the EU. The project's key deliverables include a European Skills Repertoire and MOOCs on how to verify the competences of third sector managers, aiming to create recommendations for a European framework for competence validation and development in the third sector.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### Scaffold - European Training Foundation

The *Scaffold* card deck was launched in October 2023 by the European Training Foundation (ETF) as part of the Creating New Learning (CNL) initiative. It is suitable to be applied in both formal and nonformal learning sectors, and assists in designing learning activities that integrate various key competences, adhering to European competence frameworks. Scaffold simplifies the EU key competence frameworks for educators, by combining meaningful learning activities for their learners with essential knowledge of what each competence entails, structured with instructional and assessment design prompts. Its card deck format promotes portability and collaborative use, adaptable to different user needs.

competences. supporting should encompass both cognitive and whole-of-government approach given their noncognitive competence development expertise and experiences. and move away from solely relying on time spent in education, quantity of learners in a course, labour market outcomes or other

Such methodologies aid learning providers proxies for learning"51. Therefore, the EEA to better identify and build learners' and Skills Agenda must be further developed, education, implemented, monitored and evaluated as employment and finance ministries to part of an overarching dialogue process more efficiently assign investments in involving different levels horizontally and learning opportunities. It is imperative vertically. Similarly, national skills strategies that "public investment in education and must be anchored in overarching strategies training [is] not based on monitoring where competences are situated in between and evaluation methods that flatten the work of education and employment experiences, homogenise expectations, and as it otherwise would not achieve the ignore the diversity of context, resources same impact. Learning providers are an and historical factors. The metrics used indispensable part of the success of the

51 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Investment in Education & Training: A public good for all (Position Paper), here.

# WHAT DO LEARNING PROVIDERS NEED TO ADVANCE KEY COMPETENCES?

#### **Nested whole-ness:**

From whole-of-government to whole-institution

This chapter explores how to mirror the whole-of-government approach through the whole-school one, and the role learning providers have in this context. The wholeschool approach is regarded as an aid for quality and equity in education and training<sup>52</sup>. Defined by the Commission in 2015 to tackle early school leaving<sup>53</sup>, its premise stated that academic success depends on personal, socio-economic, educational and familyrelated factors which lead to cumulative Therefore. (dis)advantage. success requires the involvement of the wider **community** (school leaders, teaching/nonteaching staff, learners, families). Hence, the Commission's recommendations put forth a governance model of education institutions, the whole-school approach, which made any institution using it a multidimensional and interactive system, learning and changing, reaching out to social services, care workers, psychologists, nurses, guidance specialists, local authorities, NGOs, volunteers, etc<sup>54</sup>. EU institutions recognised key competences' cross-curricular and interdisciplinary nature, linking them with the whole-school approach<sup>55</sup>.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

CREAM: CREAtive writing labs to foster STEAM learning - ESHA

ESHA is supporting school leaders to implement the open schooling concept using codesign, creativity and critical thinking methodologies, the purpose of multidimensional and interactive education institutions. The ESHA CREAM project case study is a microcosm for implementing this approach in STEAM learning. The tools developed by the project will design a guide focused on creative writing methodology to promote STEAM learning, but most importantly it will do so in a way that involves all stakeholders around an education and training institution.

<sup>52</sup> European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, <a href="here">here</a>; European Commission (2021). A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU, <a href="here">here</a>. 53 European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, <a href=here</a>. 54 European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, <a href=here</a>. 55 Council of the EU (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, <a href=here</a>; European Commission (2020). Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, <a href=here</a>; Council of the EU (2022). Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, <a href=here</a>.

EU proposals for reforms tackled school and collaborative teaching practices are assessment and quality assurance have to be present<sup>59</sup>. strengthened<sup>56</sup>. On learner support, reforms pointed out towards personalised learning experiences and formative assessment for competence development. Learner-centred

governance, learner support, teachers, also encouraged, in complementarity families, stakeholder involvement. On with support and counselling. The aim is governance, providers require autonomy to socialising learners as active participants in adapt to learners' needs. Providers remain school through in-class dialogue, student accountable, but school heads ought to councils or consultations to enable learners be trained and supported to deliver such to raise issues<sup>57</sup>. Interactive teaching and adaptation. As leadership is crucial, to dialogic learning with practical and real-life avoid pressure on school heads, it is better based project learning must be developed 58. to promote a distributed leadership model. Cognitive and socio-emotional skills are where teachers are emboldened to take more easily embedded within innovative initiative, responsibility, and engage in multi- curricula and pedagogical and classroom disciplinary approaches. Monitoring, self- practices when a whole-school approach is

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

Teacher Booster - European Training Foundation and the Joint Research Centre

Teacher Booster, a joint initiative between the ETF and JRC, is a series of storytelling-format videos aimed at enhancing educators' capacity to face the challenges of remote learning and highlighting key competences for all learners. The series features seven education innovators and a student from the EU and ETF partner countries, sharing insights for transitioning to digital-age education beyond traditional classroom settings. These videos focus on entrepreneurial and digital competences, as well as creativity, value creation pedagogy, life skills, 21st-century skills, design thinking, the change-maker model, and social-emotional learning.

vision. It is recommended that they engage subjects in collaboration with other teachers in peer-learning and receive incentives or beyond subjects in whole-school for continuous professional development projects. Parents and guardians require (CPD), sabbaticals for professional lifelong learning competences to engage development, additional teaching or non- in this process, accessing all information teaching resources. Training to promote and participating in decision-making collaboration, teacher leadership and within learning institutions and supporting facilitating a whole-staff sharing of skills, their children<sup>61</sup>. All is tied up in a common ideas, knowledge are practices revered for strategy that includes other stakeholders key competences promotion<sup>60</sup>. Moreover, and institutionalises collaboration. the whole-school approach offers teachers varied opportunities to identify and plan actions for competences development

Educators should be equipped to foster this within specific subjects, across several

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### Family Skills and Creative Thinking for Parents - EPA

To develop parents and guardians competences, it is essential for them to self-assess their current situation, and EPA has developed a tool to help them identify the competences they have, determine areas for improvement depending on the needs of their children and provide them with guidelines on actions/practices/resources that they can use to develop any required competences. EPA has also delved deeper specifically into creative thinking as a key competence, providing *further* guidance on this given how it can aid parents and guardians in adapting their minimal free time to become educators for their children.

60 European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving - Policy messages, here. 61 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Investment in Education and Training: A public good for all (Position Paper), here.

<sup>56</sup> European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving - Policy messages, here.

<sup>59</sup> Official Journal of the European Union (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, here.

central with all stakeholders subservient. education institutions<sup>65</sup>.

This would condition a way of learning that To this end, LLLP reflected on community teams). This provides a one-stop-shop disadvantaged<sup>63</sup>.

#### **Pulling in multiple** directions:

diverse learning providers promoting key competences

By limiting the conversation to formal education and then to separate educational levels, the lifelong learning dimension is missed. For instance, a study that looked at learning factories in Germany and India could provide insights into developing key competences<sup>64</sup>. The creation of learning factories was aimed at meeting transversal skill demands on labour markets. They

The issue, however, is that the whole-provide real-life scenarios to practise school approach is restricted to formal technical skills but also communication, education, viewing schools as the self-awareness, critical thinking and similar epicentre. In reality, the learning process transversal skills. The approach mixes in is multi-polar, so it is restrictive to view a experiential learning and real-life scenarios, specific instance of formal education as broadening the learning scope in tertiary

is not applicable to all categories of learners. A similar perspective on real-life education is captured by the Challengelifelong learning centres (CLLCs) as a more Based Learning model of the Eindhoven inclusive option<sup>62</sup>: the premise is that CLLCs University of Technology. Learners with are the heart of the community, centred different academic backgrounds join to around learners' needs, and offer flexibility tackle real-life scenarios in an effort to for access (opening hours, taking up learning boost entrepreneurial competences. They experiences, offering multidisciplinary are supported by tailored workshops on personal and professional skills, while accessible to all, especially those most engaging with companies, startups, public institutions and artists that provide the challenge<sup>66</sup>. The EU Pathways to School Success takes the same approach for experiential and blended learning, using informal spaces as laboratories for real-life learning<sup>67</sup>. Unfortunately, these processes occur at different educational levels and are not tied together in a strategic approach that considers lifelong learning **for key competences.** Moreover, instances like volunteering are forgotten even though this non-formal and informal learning builds up problem-solving, teamwork and resilience among other competences<sup>68</sup>. Non-formal adult education is less prioritised even if it aids older learners to acquire a full range of transversal skills: basic numeracy and literacy skills, health and financial literacy skills, etc<sup>69</sup>.

development institutions. There is also the term and well-planned approach. option of work-based learning, within which multinational corporations act differently For example, in 2015, democratic from small and medium-sized enterprises, competences were prioritised as a response with the latter engaging in such learning to terrorist attacks of that time. Now, digital more sparsely<sup>72</sup>. One must consider the skills and skills for green jobs are the focus diversity of adult study circles<sup>73</sup>, library- due to the risks and pace of digitalisation, based book clubs, community sports and the climate emergency. The issue is that associations<sup>74</sup>, community engagement associations, museum-led learning actions, to ensure that learners become prepared and community art clubs.

The point is not having an exhaustive list based on contemporary crises. A learningof learning providers, but rather shifting the narrative away from connecting any learning with a formal education institution. A more beneficial approach is one that identifies milestones on competence development paths, identifies pedagogies on reaching milestones and creatively unites all stakeholders in delivering this. A lifelong learning strategy at national level that connects learners of all ages can contribute to this.

In the European Year of Skills (EYS), the discourse continued to compartmentalise

The previous sections mentioned tertiary learning, prioritising specific skills and education institutions, volunteering centres, workplace learning<sup>75</sup>. As shown in LLLP's CLLCs or schools as learning providers. The Reactions to the EYS<sup>76</sup> and the European landscape also contains second-chance Semester 2023 Package<sup>77</sup>, there is a narrow learning institutions, public or private and crisis mode approach to learning. By basic skills development programmes, this, it is meant that recommendations migrant integration programmes, centres on improving learning across the Member for adult education, distance learning States are provided by the EU institutions institutions/agencies<sup>70</sup>, e-platforms and only with regards to grand challenges that EdTech providers<sup>71</sup>, and professional hit the sector, and without a structural, long-

> without key competences, it is impossible for any need that is around the corner, and it is counter-productive to simply educate to-learn approach and a true culture of lifelong learning, backed by adequate public funding in education and training are the solution. Prioritising subsections of competences or privileging some learning providers makes learners miss out on developing competences for active societal participation and a lifelong learning culture.

<sup>62</sup> Cedefop and Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). Implementing a holistic approach to lifelong learning: Community Lifelong Learning Centres as a gateway to multidisciplinary support teams, *here*.

<sup>64</sup> Devika Raj, P.; Venugopal, A.; Thiede, B.; Herrmann, C.; Sangwan, K.S. (2020). Development of the Transversal Competencies in Learning Factories, *here*.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid

<sup>66</sup> Baggen, Y., Kaffka, G., 2022, Entrepreneurial literacy and skills, Publication for the committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies, European Parliament, here.

<sup>67</sup> Council of the EU (2022). Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, here; European Commission (2022). Pathways to School Success: A New Framework For Action, here.

<sup>68</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st Century Learning Environments (Position Paper), here. 69 Ibid.

<sup>70</sup> Eurydice (2021). Adult education and training in Europe: Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications, here. 71 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Investment in Education and Training: A public good for all (Position Paper), here; SOLIDAR Foundation (2021); The Commodification of Education and the Prevalence of For-Profit Education Stakeholders, here.

<sup>72</sup> OECD (2019). OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2019; Chapter 6: Access to Skills, here.

<sup>73</sup> European Association for the Education of Adults (2018). Good practice: Study Circles, here; ABF (2023). Study circles, here. 74 European Parliament (2021). Report on EU sports policy: assessment and possible ways forward, here.

<sup>75</sup> Official Journal of the EU (2023). Decision on a European Year of Skills, here.

<sup>76</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2023). The European Year of Skills: an opportunity for Europe to look at skills beyond the labour market? (Reaction), here.

<sup>77</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2023). European Semester Country Specific Recommendations shifting from education to skills: Reactive versus Proactive behaviour in 2023, (Reaction), here.

#### **Mainstreaming** key competences:

reforms beyond the whole-school

Consensus on key competences exists at policy level, but the implementation is stunted by not adapting the underlying goal of learning in current societies. Certificates seem to gather more relevance than actual learning, so the way learning is organised depends greatly on assessment. Summative assessment<sup>78</sup> and high-stakes final cycle examinations dominate learning globally, hence, studying for the test and the acquisition of large swaths of knowledge **remain the norm.** This assessment ranks learners and categorises their learning path, helping public authorities determine where they fit on labour markets. Rooted in human capital theories, this competitive approach treats learners as disposable resources, does not encourage further learning, while grade-oriented and unidirectional forms of assessment cannot capture key competences<sup>79</sup>.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### Assessment as Dialogue -ECSWE and L4WBF

An example of formative assessments which can focus on key competences was developed by ECSWE and L4WBF through a book detailing 20 inspiring practices. The examples account for early childhood education and care, primary and secondary education and the period post-compulsory education. illustrating non-graded report writing, personal portfolios. continuous assessment, cardbased assessment, dialogical learning and assessment among many different practices implemented all around the world. Therefore, examples on adapting assessment to key competences development are readily available for policymakers.

context-specific and formative options learners' capacity to notice their strengths. broaden learners' creativity and innovative. The dialogue dimension affords them thinking, applying competences in new the opportunity to see their performance contexts. They can be attuned to learners' through another perspective, and utilise real-life experiences to ensure usage of feedback in a non-imposing manner. knowledge accrued in daily learning. The building feedback literacy<sup>81</sup>. second step requires an integration of different assessment forms<sup>80</sup>.

The first step is changing assessment Peer-to-peer assessments enhance socialmethods to promote 'learning to learn': relational skills, critical thinking, and build

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

**Debate: Democracy and Tolerance - ECNAIS** 

A practice of dialogue and involvement from learners needs to be nurtured and this is what ECNAIS aimed to do with its *initiative* for raising awareness on the potential of debating in upper secondary school for addressing polarisation, antagonism, and confrontation by enabling students' empathy, critical thinking, and creative thinking. Teachers received training on how to facilitate debating, while education institutions were provided with access to help desks, common rulebooks, debate resources. Such practices empower learners to be active participants in their learning processes.

<sup>78</sup> Based on LLLP-run focus groups and Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Position Paper Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing, here.

<sup>79</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing (Position Paper), here.

<sup>80</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing (Position Paper), here.

If the objective of assessment is rethought accountability, and collaborative skills social interactions between themselves current learning formats<sup>84</sup>. and educators, positive interdependence,

and focused on competence development (examples of cooperative learning models for active societal participation, one can include Student Team learning, Learning consider pedagogies, teacher training and *Together*, *Jigsaw* and *Group Investigation*)82. learning environments conducive to this. There is also a need for self-regulation Pedagogies akin to the transformative or students controlling their cognition, learning approach can be useful for behaviour, emotions, and motivation developing key competences. The goal through personal strategies. OECD views remains, nevertheless, to ensure that it as an important component of curricula learners are at the centre considering and educational standards for promoting their development needs. This implies transversal competences<sup>83</sup>, though it is not a need for cooperative learning, namely adequately practised in classrooms due to

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### Innovation Station: promoting self-directed learning - OBESSU

Responding to new digital practices ushered by necessity during COVID-19, OBESSU focused on supporting educators for digital education. The *set of resources* created become more meaningful in this context as they promote fostering self-directed learning. Digital education must be done while fostering self-direction, but such practices can be transferred to foster self-directed learning more broadly and make educators ready to accept learners as partners in the learning process.

It all needs to be connected with **real-** which promotes cross-curricular, which **experiences**, prioritising competences and socio-emotional skills, teaching and learning. Curricula should be which boost cognitive development, reformed beyond disciplinary boundaries academic outcomes, mental health and to incorporate key competences as crosslabour market prospects<sup>85</sup>. Socio-emotional cutting<sup>87</sup>, making it competence-based, skills and wellbeing were elevated to the equipping learners with social, civic same importance as academic outcomes in and intercultural competences, as key the *Pathways to School Success* initiative<sup>86</sup>, competences for lifelong learning<sup>88</sup>.

those promotes cross-curricular approaches to

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### **DEMOCRAT: Education for responsible democratic citizenship -**

Eucen is currently developing competence-based curricula specifically focused on education for democracy, incorporating the idea of learning projects in learners' developmental path. This project-based approach will link democratic competences with digitalisation and sustainability, showing how various competences have to be developed holistically if learners are to be active participants in society. The curriculum will be cocreated, cooperating with actors including public authorities responsible for education, municipalities, schools, students, parents, teachers, social educators, and other relevant NGOs. This further emphasises the wholecommunity approaches.

<sup>82</sup> Woods, D. & Chen, K. (2010). Evaluation Techniques For Cooperative Learning, here. 83 Karlen, Y., Hertel, S., & Hirt, C.N. (2020). Teachers' Professional Competences in Self-Regulated Learning: An Approach to Integrate Teachers' Competences as Self-Regulated Learners and as Agents of Self-Regulated Learning in a Holistic Manner, here. 84 Ibid

<sup>85</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing (Position Paper), here. 86 Council of the EU (2022). Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, here; European Commission (2022); Pathways to School Success: A New Framework For Action, here.

<sup>87</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies (Position Paper), here.

<sup>88</sup> Lifelong Learning Platform (2016). Integrating Refugees and Migrants through Education: Building Bridges in Divided Societies (Position Paper), here.

Participatory and practical learning overall pedagogies connect competences with their immediate reality. learning and learning by doing increase Outdoor learning, for example, contributes appetite for learning and transversal skills to children's pro-environmental attitudes and competences acquisition89. in adulthood, to their health, wellbeing and

competence development. **people's** Experiential learning, project-based

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

#### PERFECT: A learning by doing approach - FREREF

FREREF and its partners are engaging secondary education learners into developing intercultural and democratic citizenship competences by immersing in collaborative work to create cultural productions that are tied to their local context. Through this practice, learners understand different histories from their peers, but they also can actively practise principles of learning by doing and manifest collaborative and civic competences. More information on the project's progress can be found here.

For participatory pedagogies, educators not automatically translate into knowledge require competence-based initial and about instructing others on metacognition. continuous training that encompasses Those with pedagogical practice in this working methods for managing diversity, area are more confident to engage in discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism, such practices<sup>90</sup>; therefore, professional and conflict resolution. They need space to development and in-class space to test learn and practise, while they themselves practices are crucial. must become self-regulated learners and master competences in diagnosing, modelling, and supporting learners' selfregulated journeys. Nevetheless, holding previous knowledge on this practice does

89 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies (Position Paper), here. 90 Karlen, Y., Hirt, C.N., Jud, J., Rosenthal, A., & Eberli, T.D. (2023). Teachers as learners and agents of self-regulated learning: The importance of different teachers competence aspects for promoting metacognition, here.

## WHAT DO LEARNERS NEED TO THRIVE IN SOCIETY?

In an ever-evolving global landscape, it is essential for learning settings and methodologies to adapt accordingly. Elevating key competences in curricula be included in their own learning process requires cross-disciplinary and integrative approaches, achievable only through collaborative learning atmospheres. Besides say on curriculum content, on the teaching giving teachers flexibility to evolve and tailor curricula based on learner input through inclusive dialogues, fostering key competences requires training students as proactive collaborators in their educational iournev.

based on student engagement beyond learning providers and with the wider engaged, creative, and knowledgeable.

community, as this model favours continuous learning outside of traditional settings. In this sense, students have the option to decisions: by providing feedback on the quality of the educational process, having a and evaluation methods, having their needs taken into account when designing learning outcomes or being represented during evaluation procedures<sup>91</sup>. For example, a Boise University study<sup>92</sup> on a technology course found that allowing students to select elements like textbooks, Thelearner-centredmethodisfundamentally topics, and tools increased their sense of ownership, motivating them to be more

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

FOCAL: Fostering Outreach through Capacity-building for Adult Learning organisations - EAEA

EAEA is working on addressing adults' low participation in learning by creating learner-centred environments. Through a series of study visits and training programmes, they improved the capacity of adult learning centres to reach out to those most disadvantaged and collect practices from France, Spain, Ireland and Belgium on making learner-centred approaches a reality. Their outcomes are here.

Having agency strengthens learners' feeling of empowerment and true protagonism facilitating the development of transversal competences such as critical thinking, conflict resolution, but also motivation and principles to achieve their goals. These are essential to lead fulfilling, social, and active lives, and ensure true motivation, interest and intent to engage in communities and participate in society, certainly knowing that their participation in learning environments the developmental importance of such goes beyond their school performance or participation in the marketplace, truly meeting their needs and interests.

Though this learner-centred approach might sound obvious, Commission President Ursula von der Leyen's State of the Union address in September 2022, announced the European Year of Skills (EYS) starting from the following premise: "companies laying a foundation for lifelong learning. are also grappling with a shortage of staff [...] Europe lacks truck drivers, waiters and airport workers, as well as nurses, engineers and IT technicians"93. The EYS final decision started its first paragraphs with: 'A skilled workforce is crucial to ensuring socially fair and just green and digital transitions [...] employers report that it is difficult to find workers with the necessary skills'94. This discourse is based on employers' needs.

young age that are often overlooked, such as pattern recognition, empathy, observing, active listening and reflecting, with educational systems tending to focus on

technical rather than these core capacities. even if research confirms that fostering innate abilities is associated with improving learning outcomes<sup>95</sup>. For children to thrive in learner-centred environments, they need active, multisensory experiences like roleplaying and inquiry, which lead to better learning outcomes<sup>96</sup>. Similar findings applied to older age cohorts, as the OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills pointed out competences for increasing resilience, creativity and curiosity. The latter actually helped learners' open-mindedness, making them likelier to engage in further learning and take a self-directed approach<sup>97</sup>. Socioemotional skills are essential for students to meaningfully engage in school decisionmaking processes<sup>98</sup>, which, in turn, enhances their motivation and sense of ownership.

Without nurturing competences for a learner-centred approach, it is easy to assume that learners lack motivation and require top-down decision-making on their learning journey. Motivation is a top reason for adults not engaging in further learning<sup>99</sup>. Less than 12% adults confirmed engaging in training in the past month of their lives<sup>100</sup>. Motivation issues can stem from requirements, not people's wants and socio-economic barriers, linked to learners' employment status, to caring responsibilities within households, to financial means, or Learners possess innate abilities from a familial history of engagement in education and training, as well as their own previous experiences with learning<sup>101</sup>.

<sup>91</sup> European Students Union & Education International (2010). Student-Centred Learning: Toolkit for students, staff and higher education institutions, *here*.

<sup>92</sup> Abdelmalak, M., & Trespalacios, J. (2013) Using a Learner-Centered Approach to Develop an Educational Technology Course. Boise State University, *here*.

<sup>93</sup> European Commission (2022). State of the Union Address 2022, here.

<sup>94</sup> Official Journal of the EU (2023). Decision on a European Year of Skills, here.

<sup>95</sup> Richardson, D., Vrolijk, M., Cunsolo, S., Cebotari, V. (2021). What makes me? Core capacities for living and learning, UNICEF Office of Research, Learning for Wellbeing Foundation & Fetzer Institute, here. 96 Ibid

<sup>97</sup> OECD (2021). Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills, here.

<sup>98</sup> Organising Bureau of School Students Union (2022). School Democracy, here.

<sup>99</sup> Vanslambrouck, S. (2017). Adult Learner Characteristics as Predictors of Performance, Satisfaction and Intent-to-Persist in Online and Blended Environments, here; OECD (2019). Future-Ready Adult Learning Systems, here; OECD (2021). OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life, Chapter 4: Promoting interest and participation in adult learning, here.

<sup>100</sup> Eurostat (2023). Participation rate in education and training, 2022, here.

<sup>101</sup> Carpentieri, J.D. (2014). Improving basic skills in adulthood: Participation and Motivation, here; OECD (2021). OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life, Chapter 4: Promoting interest and participation in adult learning, here.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

LICEAL: Linking Citizenship and Employability Perspectives in Adult **Learning -** *DARE Network* 

In the LICEAL project, DARE Network connected citizenship education and transversal competences with labour market participation, exemplifying arguments made above in this Position Paper with regards to limitations of solely focusing on technical skills for labour markets. Moreover, the project worked on boosting adult learners' motivation to continue learning. Competences such as cooperation, teamwork, negotiation, sense of initiative and creativity, self-regulation and respect of social norms were instilled in them to make it easier to pursue further learning.

To advance key competence development, adult learning programs to meet the specific smaller units through modularisation allows UK<sup>103</sup>. learners to direct their learning journey by closing specific gaps they might have 102. To truly listen to learners, the priority accumulation of learning.

have incorporated the concept of learning individualisation. This approach customises

the conversation cannot be limited to needs of adults, which may involve tailoring professional upskilling, but rather the method the content, timing, or financial aspects of learning must be studied. Flexibilisation of the learning activities. The analysis is the key, with distance learning, extends beyond EU Member States and modularisation, credits, individualisation includes countries with multiple education of learning provision being elements which and training systems due to decentralised learners ask for. Breaking up learning into competences, such as Belgium and the

However, this requires the possibility to must remain basic skills and competences combine different learning opportunities acquisition. Whether in basic digital skills<sup>104</sup>, and a robust validation and recognition numerical literacy<sup>105</sup>, reading, mathematics system. A credit-based system can allow for and science<sup>106</sup>, many Europeans lag behind. Though learners request closing gaps, policy attention continuously falls on advanced Only 28 out of 41 European education and skills such as AI<sup>107</sup>, cybersecurity<sup>108</sup> or training systems, as surveyed by Eurydice, green jobs skills<sup>109</sup>. This is consistent with imbalances between labour market's and people's needs even if social cohesion rests

#### 102 European Commission, European Education and Culture Executive Agency, Adult education and training in Europe (2021) Building inclusive pathways to skills and qualifications, here.

#### **GOOD PRACTICE**

**Team2Share: Integrated Training & Teaching for Learning further aiming Knowledge Sharing Across Generations - EfVET** 

Understanding learners' needs, and especially those most disadvantaged, EfVET developed a methodology for ensuring cross-generational sharing of learning to boost basic skills development. A series of team-oriented learning resources to create solidarity in the development of basic skills can be accessed *here*, as well as a training curriculum, means for assessment and guidance for trainers.

intersection between labour market needs competences to value sustainability. formulated in the European Year of Skills support fairness, promote nature, while and people's requirements, as sector- also having systems thinking, problem specific skills and adaptation to labour framing, futures literacy, adaptability markets are large parts of learners' lives. This and exploratory thinking. All hinged on intersection, as shown previously, expanded ensuring that learners have political agency. with labour markets requiring transversal collective action capacities and individual and socio-emotional skills. There will never initiative<sup>111</sup>. For EntreComp, findings point be a full overlap, therefore, what happens to towards people's willingness to acquire all other competences required for societal more competences if their actions have a engagement? To explore this, the paper meaningful social impact<sup>112</sup>. All, and more, comes full circle, recalling that learners ties back to the CR on Key Competences for depend on developing competences Lifelong Learning<sup>113</sup>. The other competence presented in the first chapter's competence frameworks are nested within these key frameworks. LifeComp refers to selfregulation, flexibility, well-being, empathy, participation in society, learners prove a need communication, growth mindset, critical for developing all the above competences. thinking, managing learning, collaboration<sup>110</sup>.

on all being civically active. There is an GreenComp aims for learners to develop competences<sup>114</sup>. Through their continued

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. 104 Eurostat (2022). How many citizens had basic digital skills in 2021?, here.

<sup>105</sup> OECD (2023). OECD Skills Survey - PIAAC Data Explorer, here.

<sup>106</sup> European Commission (2022). Education and Training Monitor 2022, here.

<sup>107</sup> European Commission (2023). A European approach to artificial intelligence, here.

<sup>108</sup> Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (2023). Closing the cybersecurity talent gap: the Commission launches the Cybersecurity Skills

<sup>109</sup> European Commission (2023). The Green Deal Industrial Plan, here.

<sup>110</sup> Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2020). LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, here.

<sup>111</sup> Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2022). GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), here.

<sup>112</sup> European Parliament (2022). Entrepreneurial Literacy and Skills, here.

<sup>113</sup> Council of the EU (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, here.

<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

#### The structural challenges preventing key competences development:

...it was implementation and funding all along

The challenge relies on implementation. Even if there is wide-spread acknowledgement of methodologies, pedagogies, competences expectations from different and stakeholders, the learning environment structure suffered few modifications. Becoming a self-regulated learner or an educator of self-regulation requires a different approach to learning. Encouraging the whole-institutional approach demands certain resources and a re-envisioning of how stakeholders interact with each other.

To facilitate the interaction between towards informal and non-formal learning cannot fully collaborate with the formal one if investment is not increased for them and if validation and recognition of competences stagnates, as shown in the Upskilling Pathways initiative's evaluation<sup>115</sup>. To increase learners' motivation, develop meaning to what they learn, learnercentred approaches must be implemented. methods and finetuning them based on time and staff resources.

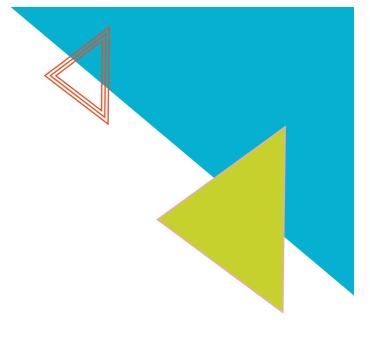
Currently, the whole-community approach is restricted mostly to economically

advantaged communities. The costs for fostering iterative partnerships beyond an education and training institution are prohibitive for institutions that might struggle with insufficient resources to retain the teaching workforce, to refurbish facilities or acquire new learning tools. The wholecommunity approach not only requires time and investment, but it also implies available training to the stakeholders to engage in this, which, yet again, is prohibitive for those most disadvantaged regions. The logistical costs for setting up such collaboration in regions which are bigger in size can also prove to be a barrier in terms of costs for certain institutions and learners. Well-off families might also be more inclined to engage in whole-community approaches compared to those disadvantaged families in which members are juggling multiple jobs and struggle to make ends meet.

stakeholders, attention must be turned The Commission engages with Member States in identifying how funding in environments as well. These environments education and training should be managed and which policies are deemed successful. This initiative, the Learning Lab<sup>116</sup>, is welcomed, but one needs to keep in mind the historic underinvestment in education and training until the pandemic, the historic underinvestment in education and a culture of lifelong learning and give training until the pandemic. Therefore, the aim should not only be to assess where to prioritise existent, but insufficient, public This implies room for trial and error, testing funding, but also to continue increasing funding and revert the cuts that the learners' needs, as well as ample financial, sector suffered in past decades. Moreover, moving from a knowledge transmission system to a competence building one, changing assessments' format, bringing additional stakeholders on board or

developing a learner-centred approach calls for systemic reforms. These cannot be achieved if one is evaluating side-by-side punctual policy interventions, because the enabling environment is missing.

Fostering key competences through a learners centred method builds the bedrock required for lifelong learning. The imperative for a whole-community approach and reform of assessment and validation processes are critical for preparing learners to navigate an increasingly complex world. Thus, it is paramount that we commit to policy focus and sustained funding at regional, national, and EU levels to enable the transformative change needed across all tiers of learning from curricular reform to the professional development of educators. Only with this comprehensive and holistic commitment can we hope to achieve the competences that citizens require to be flourishing members of society.



<sup>115</sup> European Commission (2023). Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults. here.

<sup>116</sup> European Commission (2023). Learning Lab highlights evidence-based approaches to optimise education policy, here.



The Lifelong Learning Platform is an umbrella that gathers 44 European organisations active in the field of education, training and youth. Currently these networks represent more than 50 000 educational institutions and associations covering all sectors of formal. non-formal and informal learning. Their members reach out to several millions of beneficiaries.

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