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KEY COMPETENCES FOR ALL
a lifelong learning approach

**LIFELONG
LEARNING
PLATFORM**
EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY FOR EDUCATION



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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 [here](#).



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1 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.

2 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.

3 Assessments as a learning tool and not a career test: Reform assessment in education and training with increased emphasis on 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.

4 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.

5 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.

6 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.

7 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.

8 Back your promises with action - Investment for political commitments! Dedicate adequate, structural and sustainable public 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 interconnected challenges, recognising the competences necessary for thriving lives is more crucial than ever. The idea of key competences has been discussed within the EU since the turn of the millennium, but much of the value-based discussions and agreements were not successfully translated into practice in terms of learning approaches across the EU. Therefore, the Lifelong Learning Platform (henceforth LLLP) spotlights key competences in 2023.

LLLp's work on the topic coincided with the launch of the 2023 European Year of Skills (EYS). The EYS, despite being a surprise to many, was widely welcomed by all stakeholders. It was about time to put the emphasis on education and training at EU level and rightly so after the COVID-19 pandemic which spotlighted already existing gaps in competences, prompting EU institutions and Member States' leadership to turn their attention towards developing Europeans' competences.

Following up on the momentous creation of the [European Pillar of Social Rights](#), with its first principle establishing a universal right to education, training and lifelong learning, the EYS felt like another brick to the foundation laid for reviving a strong European welfare state. In the aftermath of the 2008 economic crisis and subsequent austerity, the social policies elaborated at EU level have been an encouragement.

However, this excitement for the EYS is misplaced. 1996 was the first European Year to focus on education and training with a lifelong learning approach and was called the [European Year of Lifelong Learning](#). The decision linked educational levels, broadened participation in decision-making on learning to families and social partners, and aimed to boost learners' motivation, breaking silos in education and training. **27 years after this landmark moment, the vision of lifelong learning regressed from an all-encompassing one towards one narrowed down to skills for the labour**

market. The [EYS Decision](#) welcomes any competence development action, yet it clearly emphasises the need to solve the labour market emergency that the EU experiences: train a set amount of adults to fill in gaps in key sectors such as IT, construction and energy. This comes at a time when the [2018 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#) has been neglected. This recommendation, which focused on holistically developing learners for active participation in society, 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

EU and Member States pick up on their commitments to build a lifelong learning strategy which develops all types of competences needed for flourishing in current societies, and starts from ensuring that all learners have the basic level of such competences. The Paper is split into four chapters, each with a dedicated layer characteristic of a systemic thinking approach: from meta, macro, meso to micro levels. The first one clarifies the 'key competences' concept, the second chapter 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 toolkit of knowledge, skills and attitudes which facilitate human flourishing across various dimensions—personal, professional, social, and political¹. In accordance with 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 within their lifelong learning strategies. This was a foundational step to recognise the 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 Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning](#) that expanded and refined these ideas, aligning with contemporary challenges and opportunities. The Recommendation emphasised not just skill acquisition for labour market participation but also for full participation in society, aligning with a vision towards a European Education Area² focused on harnessing 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 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

domain. **“Skills”** are the practical capabilities allowing individuals to effectively apply knowledge in real-world contexts. **“Attitudes”** capture the mental and emotional dispositions that influence engagement with ideas, individuals, and various situations³.

For example, safeguarding health and wellbeing is part of digital safety competence. Knowledge-wise, this entails being aware of symptoms of digital 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 (establishing screen-free times, installing software limiting time, filtering content). The requisite attitude encompasses a predisposition to prioritise physical and mental wellbeing⁴. Building on this tripartite conceptualisation, the CR enumerates eight key competences considered essential: Literacy; Multilingualism; Mathematical Science, Technology and Engineering; Digital Competence; Personal and Social 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 mere articulation is insufficient; **effective 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 curricula⁵. **However, despite this comprehensive EU approach**

¹ Council of the European Union (2018). Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on key competences for lifelong learning, [here](#).

² Achieving a European Education Area by 2025 and resetting education and training for the digital age, [here](#).

³ Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). LLL Glossary: Review of Lifelong Learning Terminology, [here](#).

⁴ European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Brande, L., Carretero, S., Vuorikari, R. et al., (2016). DigComp 2.0 – The digital competence framework for citizens, [here](#).

⁵ 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](#).

to key competences, there must be an acknowledgement that the terminology and what exactly accounts for key competences are contested across 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 thinking, 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 those *“that are typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge and that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings”*⁶. [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*

*skills, knowledge or know-how needed to perform specific duties or tasks”*⁸. According to [ILO](#), the education system focuses **“on the technical skills needed 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 of personal development, as transversal and technical skills are equally crucial and their development calls for a holistic approach. **An exclusive emphasis on specialised 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

understanding diverges from the trajectory of its policies. Although the 2018 CR on Key Competences for lifelong learning provides a solid framework, terms like skills and competences are used interchangeably, often downplaying competences as defined in EU competence frameworks as knowledge-skills-attitudes¹¹, it can be noted in the development of certain policies, such as Upskilling Pathways¹² and its update in 2019¹³, that little to no reference to transversal skills or its synonyms was made. The same applies to the European Green Deal¹⁴, European Education Area¹⁵, European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan¹⁶ or the CR on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality¹⁷, where key competences, if mentioned, are always related to labour market¹⁸. 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 skills²⁰, 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

perspective errs in three fundamental respects.

Firstly, it **disregards the fact that training individuals for specialised roles exposes them to the whims of an ever-changing job 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^{21,22}. 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.

6 UNESCO-UNEVOC. TVETipedia Glossary. Transversal skills, [here](#).

7 ESCO publications (2022). Towards a structured and consistent terminology on transversal skills and competences, [here](#).

8 Brewer, L. (2013), Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? and How? Guide to core work skills. International Labour Organization, [here](#).

9 Brewer, L. (2013), Enhancing youth employability: What? Why? and How? Guide to core work skills. International Labour Organization, [here](#).

10 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), [here](#).

11 TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

12 Official Journal of the European Union (2016). Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, [here](#).

13 Official Journal of the European Union (2019). Council conclusions on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, [here](#).

14 European Commission (2019). COMMUNICATION FROM THE COMMISSION The European Green Deal, [here](#).

15 European Parliamentary Research Service (2020). AT A GLANCE European education area, [here](#).

16 European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (2021). The European pillar of social rights action plan, [here](#).

17 Official Journal of the European Union (2022). COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality, [here](#).

18 TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

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

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

21 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](#).

22 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 skills²³. 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 change²⁵.

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 whole-of-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

²³ 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](#).

²⁴ European Commission (2021). Knowledge for Policy. Glossary, Whole-of-government approach, [here](#).

²⁵ TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

education and training across Member States must be considered, but besides this, there must be an awareness that the **regional and local authorities are 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 recognised the importance of collaborations 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 of successful practices and evidence-based [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

represented such as education, labour, digital industry and finance, ensuring the development of policies based on expertise from a variety of sectors. **A key ingredient in this horizontal and vertical collaboration and coordination is the work with civil society**²⁶. 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, 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.**

Good practices on whole-of-government 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.²⁷

26 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](#).

27 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.

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-of-government 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 way²⁸.

LLL 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-of-government 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 differentiated 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.

28 TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

29 Lifelong Learning Platform (2004). Developing basic skills as key competences. A guide to good practice (European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning), [here](#).

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

skills³⁰. The [TRANSVAL-EU](#) project's State of the Art report³¹ 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 approaches even more important for current and future policies to become enriched and more comprehensive. Recent research showed that calls to balance support for key and transversal competences alongside sector specific skills come even from employment representatives. A study found that UK employers are likelier to focus on candidates capable of demonstrating job-specific skills as well as generic soft skills³² (i.e. components of key and transversal competences).

At EU level, the [Cedefop](#) Skills Panorama offers a good picture in terms of sought-after skills based on analysis of job advertisements across Member States, showing the need for adults to develop transversal skills and competences³³. A report by the McKinsey Global Institute³⁴ estimates that demand among employers for “social and emotional skills” such as

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.**³⁵

However, most available data continues to view transversal skills as separate from competences. This leads to a failure in nurturing attitudes that should be developed in parallel to transversal skills. Given the relevance of key competences beyond labour markets, for a wider range of social and environmental policies, adequate policies for competence development imply having a comprehensive way of defining achievement in learning and how these competences can be acquired.

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, including environments outside the formal system such as the youth sector, work, volunteering and civil society**^{36,37}. 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 LifeComp³⁸ 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 socio-emotional competences developed in a lifelong and life-wide learning approach.^{39,40} **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 every area of our lives. **Without a cross-sectoral approach to policies around**

citizenship education, democracy remains an empty signifier. Developing citizenship competences *“is a constant, never-ending 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 skills⁴³ 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 curiosity⁴⁴, this is a sign that **education systems are currently hindering the motivation to learn, creativity and curiosity when the opposite should be the case**⁴⁵. 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.

30 Lifelong Learning Platform (2015). Lifelong learning: Paving the way to learning and qualifications (Annual Conference), [here](#).

31 TRANSVAL-EU project (2021). Validation of transversal skills across Europe. European State of the Art Report, [here](#).

32 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](#).

33 Cedefop (2020). Skills in online job advertisements. Cedefop Skills intelligence, [here](#).

34 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](#).

35 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), [here](#).

36 TRANSVAL-EU project (2021). Validation of transversal skills across Europe. European State of the Art Report, [here](#).

37 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st century learning environments (Position Paper), [here](#).

38 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](#).

39 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Environmental sustainability rhymes with lifelong learning, [here](#).

40 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies (Position Paper), [here](#).

41 Lifelong Learning Platform (2022). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies, [here](#).

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

43 OECD (2021). OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills, [here](#).

44 Ibid.

45 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 Semester, the EU's economic governance framework, is labour market policies, failing to 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 monitor well-being in learning, the different 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 approaches ▶

The next step is leveraging the whole-of-government approach's potential 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 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 multi-stakeholder 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.

46 TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

47 Lifelong Learning Platform (2023). Status quo 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](#).

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 current gaps on this, Upskilling Pathways mentions, for example, transversal skills only in its Staff Working Document⁴⁹ 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.⁵⁰ Supporting learners with overarching strategies containing these sub-strategies 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.

49 TRANSVAL-EU project (2023). European policy coherence report, [here](#).

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

Whole-of-government approaches:

Contributions from diverse learning providers ▶

Learning providers from formal, non-formal and informal contexts are key actors in whole-of-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.**

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.

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

Such methodologies aid learning providers to better identify and build learners' competences, supporting education, employment and finance ministries to more efficiently assign investments in learning opportunities. It is imperative that *"public investment in education and training [is] not based on monitoring and evaluation methods that flatten experiences, homogenise expectations, and ignore the diversity of context, resources and historical factors. The metrics used should encompass both cognitive and noncognitive competence development and move away from solely relying on time spent in education, quantity of learners in a course, labour market outcomes or other*

*proxies for learning"*⁵¹. Therefore, the EEA and Skills Agenda must be further developed, implemented, monitored and evaluated as part of an overarching dialogue process involving different levels horizontally and vertically. Similarly, national skills strategies must be anchored in overarching strategies where competences are situated in between the work of education and employment as it otherwise would not achieve the same impact. Learning providers are an indispensable part of the success of the whole-of-government approach given their expertise and experiences.

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 whole-school approach is regarded as an aid for quality and equity in education and training⁵². Defined by the Commission in 2015 to tackle early school leaving⁵³, its premise stated that academic success depends on personal, socio-economic, educational and family-related factors which lead to cumulative (dis)advantage. **Therefore, success requires the involvement of the wider community** (school leaders, teaching/non-teaching 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, etc⁵⁴. EU institutions recognised key competences' cross-curricular and interdisciplinary nature, linking them with the whole-school approach⁵⁵.

GOOD PRACTICE

CREAM: CREative writing labs to foster STEAM learning - ESHA

ESHA is supporting school leaders to implement the open schooling concept using co-design, creativity and critical thinking methodologies, for the purpose of having 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.

⁵² European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, [here](#); European Commission (2021). A systemic, whole-school approach to mental health and well-being in schools in the EU, [here](#).

⁵³ European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, [here](#).

⁵⁴ European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving Policy messages, [here](#).

⁵⁵ Council of the EU (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, [here](#); European Commission (2020). Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, [here](#); Council of the EU (2022). Council Recommendation on Pathways to School Success, [here](#).

EU proposals for reforms tackled school governance, learner support, teachers, families, stakeholder involvement. On governance, providers require autonomy to adapt to learners' needs. Providers remain accountable, but school heads ought to be trained and supported to deliver such adaptation. As leadership is crucial, to avoid pressure on school heads, it is better to promote a distributed leadership model, where teachers are emboldened to take initiative, responsibility, and engage in multi-disciplinary approaches. Monitoring, self-assessment and quality assurance have to be strengthened⁵⁶. On learner support, reforms pointed out towards personalised learning experiences and formative assessment for competence development. Learner-centred

and collaborative teaching practices are also encouraged, in complementarity with support and counselling. The aim is socialising learners as active participants in school through in-class dialogue, student councils or consultations to enable learners to raise issues⁵⁷. Interactive teaching and dialogic learning with practical and real-life based project learning must be developed⁵⁸. Cognitive and socio-emotional skills are more easily embedded within innovative curricula and pedagogical and classroom practices when a whole-school approach is present⁵⁹.

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.

56 European Commission (2015). A whole school approach to tackling early school leaving - Policy messages, [here](#).

57 Ibid.

58 Ibid.

59 Official Journal of the European Union (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, [here](#).

Educators should be equipped to foster this vision. It is recommended that they engage in peer-learning and receive incentives for continuous professional development (CPD), sabbaticals for professional development, additional teaching or non-teaching resources. Training to promote collaboration, teacher leadership and facilitating a whole-staff sharing of skills, ideas, knowledge are practices revered for key competences promotion⁶⁰. Moreover, the whole-school approach offers teachers varied opportunities to identify and plan actions for competences development

within specific subjects, across several subjects in collaboration with other teachers or beyond subjects in whole-school projects. Parents and guardians require lifelong learning competences to engage in this process, accessing all information and participating in decision-making within learning institutions and supporting their children⁶¹. All is tied up in a common strategy that includes other stakeholders and institutionalises collaboration.

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](#).

The issue, however, is that the whole-school approach is restricted to formal education, viewing schools as the epicentre. In reality, the learning process is multi-polar, so it is restrictive to view a specific instance of formal education as central with all stakeholders subservient.

This would condition a way of learning that is not applicable to all categories of learners. To this end, LLLP reflected on community lifelong learning centres (CLLCs) as a more inclusive option⁶²: the premise is that CLLCs are the heart of the community, centred around learners' needs, and offer flexibility for access (opening hours, taking up learning experiences, offering multidisciplinary teams). This provides a one-stop-shop accessible to all, especially those most disadvantaged⁶³.

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 competences⁶⁴. The creation of learning factories was aimed at meeting transversal skill demands on labour markets. They

provide real-life scenarios to practise technical skills but also communication, self-awareness, critical thinking and similar transversal skills. The approach mixes in experiential learning and real-life scenarios, broadening the learning scope in tertiary education institutions⁶⁵.

A similar perspective on real-life education is captured by the Challenge-Based Learning model of the Eindhoven University of Technology. Learners with different academic backgrounds join to tackle real-life scenarios in an effort to boost entrepreneurial competences. They are supported by tailored workshops on personal and professional skills, while engaging with companies, startups, public institutions and artists that provide the challenge⁶⁶. The EU Pathways to School Success takes the same approach for experiential and blended learning, using informal spaces as laboratories for real-life learning⁶⁷. **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 competences⁶⁸. 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, etc⁶⁹.

The previous sections mentioned tertiary education institutions, volunteering centres, CLLCs or schools as learning providers. The landscape also contains second-chance learning institutions, public or private basic skills development programmes, migrant integration programmes, centres for adult education, distance learning institutions/agencies⁷⁰, e-platforms and EdTech providers⁷¹, and professional development institutions. There is also the option of work-based learning, within which multinational corporations act differently from small and medium-sized enterprises, with the latter engaging in such learning more sparsely⁷². One must consider the diversity of adult study circles⁷³, library-based book clubs, community sports associations⁷⁴, community engagement associations, museum-led learning actions, and community art clubs.

The point is not having an exhaustive list of 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

learning, prioritising specific skills and workplace learning⁷⁵. As shown in LLLP's Reactions to the EYS⁷⁶ and the European Semester 2023 Package⁷⁷, there is a narrow and crisis mode approach to learning. By this, it is meant that recommendations on improving learning across the Member States are provided by the EU institutions only with regards to grand challenges that hit the sector, and without a structural, long-term and well-planned approach.

For example, in 2015, democratic competences were prioritised as a response to terrorist attacks of that time. Now, digital skills and skills for green jobs are the focus due to the risks and pace of digitalisation, and the climate emergency. The issue is that without key competences, it is impossible to ensure that learners become prepared for any need that is around the corner, and it is counter-productive to simply educate based on contemporary crises. A learning-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.

62 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](#).

63 Ibid.

64 Devika Raj, P.; Venugopal, A.; Thiede, B.; Herrmann, C.; Sangwan, K.S. (2020). Development of the Transversal Competencies in Learning Factories, [here](#).

65 Ibid.

66 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](#).

67 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](#).

68 Lifelong Learning Platform (2019). 21st Century Learning Environments (Position Paper), [here](#).

69 Ibid.

70 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](#).

72 OECD (2019). OECD SME and Entrepreneurship Outlook 2019; Chapter 6: Access to Skills, [here](#).

73 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](#).

75 Official Journal of the EU (2023). Decision on a European Year of Skills, [here](#).

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

77 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 assessment⁷⁸ 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 uni-directional forms of assessment cannot capture key competences⁷⁹.**

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, card-based 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.

The first step is changing assessment methods to promote 'learning to learn': context-specific and formative options broaden learners' creativity and innovative thinking, applying competences in new contexts. They can be attuned to learners' real-life experiences to ensure usage of knowledge accrued in daily learning. The second step requires an integration of different assessment forms⁸⁰.

Peer-to-peer assessments enhance social-relational skills, critical thinking, and build learners' capacity to notice their strengths. The dialogue dimension affords them the opportunity to see their performance through another perspective, and utilise feedback in a non-imposing manner, building feedback literacy⁸¹.

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.

78 Based on LLLP-run focus groups and Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Position Paper Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing, [here](#).

79 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing (Position Paper), [here](#).

80 Lifelong Learning Platform (2021). Rethinking Assessments: Prioritising Learners' Wellbeing (Position Paper), [here](#).

81 Ibid.

If the objective of assessment is rethought and focused on competence development for active societal participation, one can consider pedagogies, teacher training and learning environments conducive to this. Pedagogies akin to the transformative learning approach can be useful for developing key competences. **The goal remains, nevertheless, to ensure that learners are at the centre considering their development needs.** This implies a need for cooperative learning, namely social interactions between themselves and educators, positive interdependence,

accountability, and collaborative skills (examples of cooperative learning models include *Student Team learning*, *Learning Together*, *Jigsaw* and *Group Investigation*)⁸². There is also a need for **self-regulation** or students controlling their cognition, behaviour, emotions, and motivation through personal strategies. **OECD views it as an important component of curricula and educational standards for promoting transversal competences**⁸³, though it is not adequately practised in classrooms due to current learning formats⁸⁴.

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.

82 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.

It all needs to be connected with **real-life experiences**, prioritising those competences and socio-emotional skills, which boost cognitive development, academic outcomes, mental health and labour market prospects⁸⁵. Socio-emotional skills and wellbeing were elevated to the same importance as academic outcomes in the *Pathways to School Success* initiative⁸⁶,

which promotes cross-curricular, which promotes cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning. Curricula should be reformed beyond disciplinary boundaries to incorporate key competences as cross-cutting⁸⁷, making it **competence-based, equipping learners with social, civic and intercultural competences, as key competences for lifelong learning**⁸⁸.

GOOD PRACTICE

DEMOCRAT: Education for responsible democratic citizenship - *Eucen*

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 co-created, cooperating with actors including public authorities responsible for education, municipalities, schools, students, parents, teachers, social educators, and other relevant NGOs. This further emphasises the whole-community approaches.

85 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](#).

87 Lifelong Learning Platform (2020). Lifelong Learning for Sustainable Societies (Position Paper), [here](#).

88 Lifelong Learning Platform (2016). Integrating Refugees and Migrants through Education: Building Bridges in Divided Societies (Position Paper), [here](#).

Participatory and practical learning pedagogies connect people's competences with their immediate reality.

Outdoor learning, for example, contributes to children's pro-environmental attitudes in adulthood, to their health, wellbeing and

overall competence development. Experiential learning, project-based learning and learning by doing increase appetite for learning and transversal skills and competences acquisition⁸⁹.

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 require competence-based initial and continuous training that encompasses working methods for managing diversity, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism, and conflict resolution. They need space to learn and practise, while they themselves must become self-regulated learners and master competences in diagnosing, modelling, and supporting learners' self-regulated journeys. Nevertheless, holding previous knowledge on this practice does

not automatically translate into knowledge about instructing others on metacognition. Those with pedagogical practice in this area are more confident to engage in such practices⁹⁰; therefore, professional development and in-class space to test practices are crucial.

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 requires cross-disciplinary and integrative approaches, achievable only through collaborative learning atmospheres. **Besides 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 journey.**

The learner-centred method is fundamentally based on student engagement beyond learning providers and with the wider

community, as this model favours continuous learning outside of traditional settings. In this sense, **students have the option to be included in their own learning process decisions: by providing feedback on the quality of the educational process, having a say on curriculum content, on the teaching and evaluation methods, having their needs taken into account when designing learning outcomes or being represented during evaluation procedures**⁹¹. For example, a Boise University study⁹² on a technology course found that allowing students to select elements like textbooks, topics, and tools increased their sense of ownership, motivating them to be more engaged, creative, and knowledgeable.

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](#).

91 European Students Union & Education International (2010). Student-Centred Learning: Toolkit for students, staff and higher education institutions, [here](#).

92 Abdelmalak, M., & Trespalacios, J. (2013) Using a Learner-Centered Approach to Develop an Educational Technology Course. Boise State University, [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 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 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' requirements, not people's wants and needs.**

Learners possess innate abilities from a 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 outcomes⁹⁵. For children to thrive in learner-centred environments, they need active, multisensory experiences like role-playing and inquiry, which lead to better learning outcomes⁹⁶. Similar findings applied to older age cohorts, as the [OECD Survey on Social and Emotional Skills](#) pointed out the developmental importance of such 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 approach⁹⁷. Socio-emotional skills are essential for students to meaningfully engage in school decision-making processes⁹⁸, which, in turn, enhances their motivation and sense of ownership, laying a foundation for lifelong learning.

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 learning⁹⁹. Less than 12% adults confirmed engaging in training in the past month of their lives¹⁰⁰. Motivation issues can stem from socio-economic barriers, linked to learners' employment status, to caring responsibilities within households, to financial means, or familial history of engagement in education and training, as well as their own previous experiences with learning¹⁰¹.

93 European Commission (2022). State of the Union Address 2022, [here](#).

94 Official Journal of the EU (2023). Decision on a European Year of Skills, [here](#).

95 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.

97 OECD (2021). Beyond Academic Learning: First Results from the Survey of Social and Emotional Skills, [here](#).

98 Organising Bureau of School Students Union (2022). School Democracy, [here](#).

99 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](#).

100 Eurostat (2023). Participation rate in education and training, 2022, [here](#).

101 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](#).

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, the conversation cannot be limited to professional upskilling, but rather the method of learning must be studied. **Flexibilisation is the key, with distance learning, modularisation, credits, individualisation of learning provision being elements which learners ask for.** Breaking up learning into smaller units through modularisation allows learners to direct their learning journey by closing specific gaps they might have¹⁰². However, this requires the possibility to combine different learning opportunities and a robust validation and recognition system. A credit-based system can allow for accumulation of learning.

Only 28 out of 41 European education and training systems, as surveyed by Eurydice, have incorporated the concept of learning individualisation. This approach customises

adult learning programs to meet the specific needs of adults, which may involve tailoring the content, timing, or financial aspects of the learning activities. The analysis extends beyond EU Member States and includes countries with multiple education and training systems due to decentralised competences, such as Belgium and the UK¹⁰³.

To truly listen to learners, the priority must remain basic skills and competences acquisition. Whether in basic digital skills¹⁰⁴, numerical literacy¹⁰⁵, reading, mathematics and science¹⁰⁶, many Europeans lag behind. Though learners request closing gaps, policy attention continuously falls on advanced skills such as AI¹⁰⁷, cybersecurity¹⁰⁸ or green jobs skills¹⁰⁹. 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](#).
103 Ibid.
104 Eurostat (2022). How many citizens had basic digital skills in 2021?, [here](#).
105 OECD (2023). OECD Skills Survey - PIAAC Data Explorer, [here](#).
106 European Commission (2022). Education and Training Monitor 2022, [here](#).
107 European Commission (2023). A European approach to artificial intelligence, [here](#).
108 Digital Skills and Jobs Platform (2023). Closing the cybersecurity talent gap: the Commission launches the Cybersecurity Skills Academy, [here](#).
109 European Commission (2023). The Green Deal Industrial Plan, [here](#).

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.

on all being civically active. There is an intersection between labour market needs formulated in the European Year of Skills and people's requirements, as sector-specific skills and adaptation to labour markets are large parts of learners' lives. This intersection, as shown previously, expanded with labour markets requiring transversal and socio-emotional skills. There will never be a full overlap, therefore, what happens to all other competences required for societal engagement? To explore this, the paper comes full circle, recalling that learners depend on developing competences presented in the first chapter's competence frameworks. LifeComp refers to self-regulation, flexibility, well-being, empathy, communication, growth mindset, critical thinking, managing learning, collaboration¹¹⁰.

GreenComp aims for learners to develop competences to value sustainability, support fairness, promote nature, while also having systems thinking, problem framing, futures literacy, adaptability and exploratory thinking. All hinged on ensuring that learners have political agency, collective action capacities and individual initiative¹¹¹. For EntreComp, findings point towards people's willingness to acquire more competences if their actions have a meaningful social impact¹¹². All, and more, ties back to the CR on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning¹¹³. The other competence frameworks are nested within these key competences¹¹⁴. Through their continued participation in society, learners prove a need for developing all the above competences.

110 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](#).
111 Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M., (2022). GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), [here](#).
112 European Parliament (2022). Entrepreneurial Literacy and Skills, [here](#).
113 Council of the EU (2018). Council Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning, [here](#).
114 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 and expectations from different 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 stakeholders, **attention must be turned towards informal and non-formal learning environments as well.** These environments 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 evaluation¹¹⁵. **To increase learners' motivation, develop a culture of lifelong learning and give meaning to what they learn, learner-centred approaches must be implemented.** This implies room for trial and error, testing methods and finetuning them based on learners' needs, as well as ample financial, 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 whole-community 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.

The Commission engages with Member States in identifying how funding in education and training should be managed and which policies are deemed successful. This initiative, the Learning Lab¹¹⁶, 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 training until the pandemic. Therefore, the aim should not only be to assess where to prioritise existent, but insufficient, public funding, but also to continue increasing funding and revert the cuts that the 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.



¹¹⁵ European Commission (2023). Commission Staff Working Document: Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults, [here](#).

¹¹⁶ 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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