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Briefing paper on Transversal Skills

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Briefing Paper: Transversal Skills and Validation (WP1 deliverable – D1.1)

This briefing paper aims at describing a common understanding within the VISKA project partnership (www.viskaproject.eu) regarding the definition of Transversal Skills and to develop a means for identifying and assessing these transversal skills in a validation process for low-qualified adults and migrants. As a later activity in the project assessment criteria will be further developed in Work Package 3 based on this briefing paper and used in the field-trials in some partner countries. The set of skills composing the framework for Transversal Skills in the context of the VISKA project are presented in a table on page 4. It is acknowledged that there are other considerations such as the European Commission's eight key competence framework which could have relevance within national and European systems but which are beyond the scope of this paper.

The VISKA partnership decided to use the term Validation of Prior Learning (VPL) instead of Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning (VNFIL) since the term VPL is broader and includes all types of learning; formal, non-formal and informal. In the case of migrants, there is a need to take all types of learning into account in the validation process, including documents of formal learning which may not be valued directly as such in the receiving countries National Qualification Frameworks.

Definition of Transversal Skills

In advance of defining what transversal skills refer to in the context of the VISKA project it is important to acknowledge the extensive discourse around the area of knowledge, skill and competence. It is the latter terms of skill and competence which are of particular interest to the VISKA project. There is currently no international consensus on the meaning of skills and competences. In fact, the use and definition of skills and competencies varies widely¹.

This becomes even more complicated when trying to come to a consensus on the definition of Transversal Skills, a skill set that employers and the labour market are increasingly conscious of and looking for. In the narrowest sense, skill refers to being able to do something well, for example, drive a nail. While competence can also be used in a similar way, it has over time become more associated with not only being able to do something well (without a context) but being able to do something relevant but not limited to a particular role. For example, when it comes to being able to communicate, it is not only a matter of being able to speak or write, but to be able to speak or write competently within different contexts in the family, in the community and in the workplace.

As outlined in the VISKA application, Transversal Skills (as opposed to job-specific skills) are commonly understood as the ability to work in a team, to communicate effectively, to be proficient in foreign languages, to be entrepreneurial, to be able to think creatively and to be able to solve problems. Transversal Skills are also referred to as generic skills that include *soft skills* (such as communication, problem solving abilities, teamwork and motivation), but also encompass ICT, language and cognitive skills (such as collaboration, negotiating and information-sharing).

¹ Definitions of skills and competencies vary between official documents from the European Commission. A case in point is The Recommendation on key competences for Lifelong learning and The Recommendation on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for Lifelong Learning. The first Recommendation uses "skills" as a component of "competence", while the second one puts the two concepts on the same level, together with "knowledge."

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Despite the importance of Transversal Skills in the labour market, in education and in many other life and social domains, they are not always sufficiently visible to be captured and valued. It is by valuing transversal skills that VISKA aims to contribute to encouraging a transnational consensus on, and a common language for, the definition of Transversal Skills - including the development of validation criteria - as a prerequisite for their effective documentation and possible outcome of the validation process.

The VISKA partner consortium has reviewed various definitions of Transversal Skills, such as those developed by CEDEFOP, ELGPN, ESCO, UNESCO, Skills Panorama (EC), Conference board of Canada and more. These definitions differed in a number of respects, yet they were all interrelated and linked to other categories of skills and competence definitions (Basic Skills, Employability Skills, Key Competences, 21st Century Skills etc.).

Based on discussions among the project partners it was decided to adopt a view of Transversal Skills such as that put forward by UNESCO (*Bangkok 2014, Asia Pacific*):

Transversal Skills are those typically considered as not specifically related to a particular job, task, academic discipline or area of knowledge but as skills that can be used in a wide variety of situations and work settings (IBE 2013). These skills are increasingly in high demand for learners to successfully adapt to changes and to lead meaningful and productive lives.

Examples include:

<i>Critical and innovative thinking</i>
<i>Inter-personal skills (e.g. presentation and communication skills, organizational skills, teamwork, etc.)</i>
<i>Intra-personal skills (e.g. self-discipline, enthusiasm, perseverance, self-motivation etc.)</i>
<i>Global citizenship (e.g. tolerance, openness, respect for diversity, intercultural understanding, etc.)</i>
<i>Media and information literacy such as the ability to locate and access information, as well as to analyse and evaluate media content</i>

Source: UNESCO (Bangkok) 2014, Asia Pacific

The project partners find that the overlap between Transversal Skills, Basic Skills and Key Skills needs to be addressed when developing the criteria for Transversal Skills for use in Validation of Prior Learning (VPL). Transversal Skills are based on a core of Basic Skills which incorporate *'the skills needed to live in contemporary society, such as listening, speaking, reading, writing and mathematics.'* Cedefop, Bjørnåvold, 2000; Cedefop, Tissot, 2000.

Key Competences and Key Skills are defined as "the sum of skills (Basic and New Basic Skills) needed to live in contemporary knowledge society." Cedefop, 2004; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006.

As Transversal skills can be evidenced at many levels, from basic to advanced, in our work in VISKA we consider Transversal Skills as encompassing Basic and Key skills.

In VISKA the example of Transversal Skills from UNESCO will be adapted to include the following skills.

Transversal Skills – a set of skills presented as a framework within the VISKA project:

Critical and innovative thinking <ul style="list-style-type: none">• problem solving, creativity, conscientiousness, entrepreneurship, ability to learn (from Key Skills)
Inter-personal skills, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• presentation and communication skills; both in mother tongue and in foreign language (the specification from Key Skills)• organizational skills• teamwork
Intra-personal skills, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• self-discipline• perseverance• self-motivation
Global citizenship, such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• tolerance• openness• respect for diversity• intercultural understanding• cultural expression and intercultural, social and civic competence (from Key Skills)
Media and information processing/literacy such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• the ability to locate and access information• the ability to analyse and evaluate media content• the ability to understand and analyze numerical and statistical information• digital competence (from Key Skills)

In the following work in VISKA we will define criteria for Transversal Skills as we define them in the table above and try out these criteria in validation procedures.

How can Transversal Skills be embedded/used in VPL?

In VISKA the aim is to make visible the skills of migrants and low-qualified people through identification, documentation and assessment of competences based on agreed criteria.

Identification and documentation are the first two phases of the VPL process as defined in the Council recommendation (2012). They also involve what is called “skills audit”, which, according to the European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (2015), has the aim of helping individuals:

- a) to reflect on and become conscious of their actual capabilities (knowledge, skills and competence);

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- b) to help the unemployed and other disadvantaged groups – for example low skilled adults and migrants – to develop their careers and increase their employability prospects;
- c) to provide users with a means of making visible and marketing their skills and competences;
- d) to map needs for further training, considering the importance of matching the individual's competences with labour market needs.

In the process of identification and documentation of competences it is sometimes a challenge to describe what standards or criteria the person needs to meet in their description of competences. The tools used may have rather vague headings, as for example *“competences from job experience, education/training and other learning arenas such as social/leisure activities”*. In this part of the validation process it can be helpful to have more specific criteria that describe the skills that are needed or in demand by society and the labour market. This includes Transversal Skills, as described in this paper. In work package 3 the VISKA partners will define criteria for Transversal Skills to be tested in the tryouts later in the project period.

Following the documentation of competences, the results could be used:

- 1) to identify and document own competences/skills **in a wide perspective** (Transversal Skills for example) for personal development and/or appropriate job opportunities or education with the individual (phases 1 and 2 of the VPL process);
- 2) to make an assessment of the documented skills resulting in certification (phases 3 and 4 of the VPL process);
- 3) to identify and document skills **against job related or curricula related criteria** (phases 1 and 2 of the VPL process);
- 4) to make a formal assessment of job related/curricula related competences and provide certification in a specific sector (phases 3 and 4 of the VPL process).

Partnership discussions have pointed out that Transversal Skills should not be used in isolation from other criteria, e.g. it is important to look at the total skill set of the individual, in order to identify appropriate opportunities for further development and active participation in society. It is important to identify Transversal Skills developed both through work experience and within a more personal context (family, leisure, independent studies etc.).

What challenges are linked to validating Transversal Skills with the VISKA target group?

Supporting the growth of human capital by making knowledge, skills and competences more visible is a common challenge for all VISKA partner countries. Currently the 4 countries are facing urgent challenges tied to the influx of refugees. While there are 4-phased validation arrangements described in the policies of the participating countries, practices remain different and in some of the countries important elements in policy terms are still missing – for example, a legal framework for validation and arrangements for financial support.

Validation arrangements are fragmented within each country and could be developed towards increased transparency of competences among citizens. There is both a need for better tools (including electronic tools) for identifying and documenting skills (skills audit) and for interventions centered on improving the competences of guidance counsellors and other frontline staff involved in validation processes.

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This paper presents a consensus in VISKA on the definition of Transversal Skills as described above, and we will develop criteria for identifying and documenting these skills.

There are some challenges linked to defining criteria for Transversal Skills. Some of the skills are very closely linked to personal characteristics and may be difficult to assess objectively and consequently to improve by further training. It is ethically problematic to document and assess these kinds of skills.

As a consequence of this, VISKA will develop criteria for some chosen skills in the Transversal Skills definition. We will choose to develop criteria only for skills that we consider possible to assess in our target groups. We need to take into account how these criteria might be met in our target groups and what kind of methods and tools we are able to develop and use in the validation process.

Reaching the target group may also be a challenge and a measure that needs specific attention itself in conjunction with the development of a linguistically and culturally sensitive VPL procedures.

In validation of Transversal Skills, the frontline staff, especially guidance personnel need to have cultural sensitivity, ability to understand the starting position of the individual, ability to build trust and ability to motivate and support. They need to be able to recognise personal skills through different forms of communication to bring forward skills that may be relevant for the assessment.

Developing criteria for assessment of Transversal Skills

In this briefing paper (Deliverable D1.1), produced in November 2017, the partnership has come to a consensus on a set of skills (framework) describing Transversal Skills in the context of the VISKA project. Based on this framework the partnership will work on developing criteria to be used in the field trials that are to begin mid-year 2018. The results from the field trials, including the identification, documentation and possibly the assessment of Transversal Skills, will be evaluated through data collected during trials and reported in a comparative report on final results of VISKA 3-country field trials (Deliverable D5.2), to be produced in January 2020. All project products will be published on the project website www.viskaproject.eu

Resources

CEDEFOP and ELGPN: <http://www.elgpn.eu/elgpndb/view/251>

Cedefop, Bjørnåvold, 2000; Cedefop, Tissot, 2000. Found in Europass Glossary

Cedefop, 2004; European Parliament and Council of the European Union, 2006.

ESCO – development of skills: https://ec.europa.eu/education/policy/strategic-framework/skills-development_en

UNESCO: <http://www.unevoc.unesco.org/go.php?q=TVETipedia+glossary+A-Z&filt=all&id=577>

Assessment of Transversal Competencies – Policy and Practice in the Asia-Pacific Region:
<http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0024/002465/246590E.pdf>

Assessment of Transversal skill- ATS2020:

<http://www.eportfolio.eu/community/projects/assessment-transversal-skills-ats2020>

Skills Panorama – inspiring choices on skills and jobs in Europe:

<http://skillspanorama.cedefop.europa.eu/en/content/transversal-skills>

Conference Board of Canada – Employability Skills 2000+:

<http://www.conferenceboard.ca/topics/education/learning-tools/employability-skills.aspx>

European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning (2015)

Council recommendation (2012)

European inventory on validation: 2014 update:

<https://cumulus.cedefop.europa.eu/files/vetelib/2014/87250.pdf>