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Together for Future VETskills - ToVET

**SECONDARY RESEARCH ON THE KEY COMPETENCES FOR
LIFELONG LEARNING**

Findings in Finland, Italy and Spain



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Abstract	<p>This report collects and summarises the existing material concerning the use of the framework for the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in the three project partner countries.</p> <p>Questions to be answered are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which key competences are used in the partner countries' VET schools? - What are the official guidelines? - How are they included and built in to the curricula (national and local curricula – if such exist)? - How are they to be assessed, identified and recognised (according to national requirements)? - How will they be displayed to the employer?
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List of abbreviations

VET	Vocational education and Training
leFP	Istruzione e formazione professionale; a three-year program leading to a vocational qualification in Italy
EQF	European Qualifications Framework
QNQ	Quadro Nazionale delle Qualifiche; National Qualifications Framework in Italy
Racc. 2018	Raccomandazioni del Consiglio; European Council Recommendation
INAPP	National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies
ISRE	Istituto Salesiano Ricerca Educativa - Salesian Institute for Educational Research



Executive summary

Together for Future VETskills project (ToVET) is funded by the European Union under the programme Erasmus+ KA3 – Support for Policy Reform Networks and Partnerships of Vocational Education and Training (VET).

The project involves four networks from different parts of Europe.

The project activities aim to:

- Strengthen cooperation among VET providers by engaging in mutual learning, peer counselling, and capacity building, aimed at raising the quality and attractiveness of VET provision
- Promote and foster the effective use of EU funding instruments
- Support the implementation and dissemination of relevant EU tools and initiatives in the field of VET, whenever possible in national language(s)
- Involve and reach-out to VET providers that do not yet contribute or benefit from European cooperation.
- Contribute to the European Vocational Skills Week
- Support the development of an internationalisation strategy at providers' level, fostering the mobility of leaders, staff and VET learners, as well as the establishment of cooperation partnerships.
- Foster innovative learning of key competences in VET (for example, allow flexibility and adaptability to meet individual learning needs) by adapting programme design and assessment.

Within the above-mentioned framework, the following report aims to collect and summarise the existing material concerning the use of the framework for the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in the three project partner countries. The report is a first step that will support the partnership during the implementation of WP4 – Key Competences.



Introduction

The most recent EU recommendation on eight key competences for lifelong learning states back to 2018 and revises the 2006 recommendation also taking into consideration the preconditions of today's world. The recommendation not only describes the competences but also gives guidance and examples of good practices. (European Union 2019, 3.)

Being a reference tool for education and training providers, the recommendation identifies eight key competences believed to be vital for personal achievement, lifestyle supporting health and sustainability, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion. It presents ways to successfully promote their development through various ways. (European Union 2019, 4.)

This report collects and summarises the existing material concerning the use of the framework for the Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in the three project partner countries.

We are seeking answers to the following five questions: Which key competences are used in the partner countries' VET schools? What are the official guidelines? How are they included and built in to the curricula (national and local curricula – if such exist)? How are they to be assessed, identified and recognised (according to national requirements)? How will they be displayed to the employer?

Document Structure

This report comprises of three sections.

- The first part gives an overview of the concept and the framework as settled by the European Union.
- The second part includes the descriptions from the partner countries (Finland, Italy and Spain) and depicts the ways the Key Competences are embedded in the curricula in VET in these countries.
- The third and final part draws together general conclusions on the matter along with an introduction to the next steps of the procedure to create a guidebook on good practices and tools for Key competences for lifelong learning as well as the Open Badges for Key competences.

Methodology and Approach

This survey was executed in summer-autumn of 2020 by the partners of the ToVET project. National and if necessary, also regional and school-specific curricula were inspected to find out how and in which extent the Key competences for lifelong learning are visible in them.

In Finland, the National Agency for Education was consulted, and the survey was filled in together with them.



In Italy, Mr Arduino Salatin, the vice-president from the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Vocational and Educational System and the advisor for the Italian Ministry of Education was consulted.

In Spain the survey was conducted with the support of several VET schools and institutions.

The survey submitted to the stakeholders consisted of 6 multiple choice questions and 4 open ended questions where respondents could provide more precise comments (see Annex 1). The survey was submitted online to improve the response rate and make collecting the results easier.

Table 1. Stakeholders engaged in the survey

Finland	Italy	Spain
The Finnish National Agency for Education; Mr Mika Saarinen and Ms Sari Turunen-Zwinger	INVALSI (the National Institute for the Evaluation of the Vocational and Educational System); Mr Arduino Salatin	Various VET schools and institutions mostly in the Basque country



Key competences for lifelong learning – definition

The key competences are combined of knowledge, skills and attitudes and are developed all through life in formal, non-formal and informal settings. Knowledge is comprised of already settled concepts, facts, figures, ideas and theories that support understanding of a specific area or subject. Skills equal the capacity to accomplish processes and to implement the existing knowledge into action. Attitudes depict the tendency and mentality to act or react to ideas. (European Union 2019, 5.)

The equally important key competences are Literacy competence, Multilingual competence, Mathematical competence and competence in science, technology and engineering, Digital competence, Personal, social and learning to learn competence, Citizenship competence, Entrepreneurship competence and Cultural awareness and expression competence (European Union 2019, 5).

Assessment, identification and recognition of key competences

Assessment influences individuals and their learning progress making it easier for them to gain and process new knowledge and skills. It also helps individuals to understand their favoured learning styles and become sovereign and self-assured in learning. Validation of competences or assessment leading to qualifications help the individuals to communicate their competences when seeking further learning opportunities or employment. It is therefore crucial to develop ways and tools of assessment that capture how far a learner succeeds in developing certain competences.

Key competence descriptions formulated into detailed schemes of learning outcomes combined with versatile assessment support this process. Learning, teaching and assessment are closely connected and any approach that affects one of these elements will also affect the others. This implies that decisions made about assessment have a major significance on how the key competences are taught and also on what individuals learn. (European Union 2019, 16.)

The Relations between key competences, soft skills and transversal competences

There is a special connection between the Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Competence which outlines the future-oriented competences making it possible to cope with complexity, uncertainty and change in global contexts. These competences have been increasingly debated in research resulting in varied definitions such as soft skills or transversal competences among others. (Caena 2019, 13-14.)

Soft skills are considered to be broadly applicable qualities, habits and attitudes. Examples of soft skills cover many elements of the afore mentioned key competence, mostly in the personal and social development areas, including self-esteem and self-management, motivation, sense of responsibility, flexibility (personal development); making decisions, empathy, leadership, sociability (social development), and time management (learning to learn). (Caena 2019, 14.)



Transversal competences in the other hand focus on the holistic development and adapting to change. They foreground intrapersonal skills and add reference to healthy lifestyles. (Caena 2019, 14.)



Key competences in VET

Competences needed for continuous learning, taking on future and new situations, and in changing working conditions. They form an important part of professionalism and reflect an individual's intellectual flexibility and coping with a variety of situations.

The key competences increase the necessary professional culture and civic competences in all fields, as well as the ability to keep up with changes in society and working life. They have a great importance for an individual's quality of life and personality development.

In the future, the key competences will play an even greater role as lifelong learning and career opportunities diversify. Due to changes in working life and society, the need for continuous competence development is growing in order to ensure rapid upskilling and reskilling.

Key competences in VET in the three ToVET partner countries

A series of surveys will be conducted in 2020-2021 to find out the situation and developments of the implementation of the key competences of lifelong learning in VET in Finland, Italy and Spain. In autumn 2020 a general survey for the national and /or regional status of the key competences was executed. The results are explained in the following section.

The small-scale survey displayed that the key competences are written in the national curricula in VET in all partner countries. In Italy and Spain, they are displayed as separate modules whereas in Finland they are written in the vocational subjects. However, at the end of the studies, only in Italy the students have a written mention about studying the key competences in their certificate.

Finland

There is a national curriculum stating all the skills requirements and competence objectives. The National Agency for Education forms the curriculum and the competence objectives as well as skills requirements for each qualification. It is then up to each school to decide how they arrange the education so that the skill requirements in the national curricula are gained.

Key competences for lifelong learning have been included in the skills requirements and competence objectives of the basics of vocational qualifications and training. Key skills can also be taken into account in development projects and in the development of the skills of teaching and mentoring staff.

The Key competences are found both in vocational subjects and in general subjects. The requirements of competence-based qualifications and key competences are common to all vocational fields.

How are the key competences displayed/visible in your country's vocational qualifications?

They are written in the vocational subjects.



Are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised as part of the qualifications?

Yes.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised?

As a part of the personal competence development plan process.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences assessed?

As part of the vocational skills and competence.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences accredited as part of the qualification?

There is no mention in the certificate.

Italy

In Italy vocational education and training (VET) is characterized by multilevel governance with broad involvement of national, regional and local stakeholders. Ministries of Education and Labour lay down general rules and common principles for the education and training system. Regions and autonomous provinces are in charge of VET programs and most apprenticeship-type schemes.

Compulsory education lasts 10 years, up to age 16. At age 14 learners make a choice between general education and VET. They have the 'right/duty' (diritto/dovere) to stay in education until age 18 to accomplish 12 years of education and/or vocational qualification.

At upper secondary level, the following VET programs are offered:

(a) five-year programmes (EQF level 4) at technical schools (istituti tecnici) lead to technical education diplomas; at vocational schools (istituti professionali) they lead to professional education diplomas. Programmes combine general education and VET and can also be delivered in the form of alternance training. Graduates have access to higher education.

(b) three-year programmes (istruzione e formazione professionale, IeFP) lead to a vocational qualification (attestato di qualifica di operatore professionale; EQF level 3).

(c) four-year programmes lead to a technician professional diploma (diploma professionale di tecnico; EQF level 4).

The five years programmes (a) (ruled by the Ministry of Education) and the three/four years ones (b and c) (ruled by the State-Regions Conference) are the 2 pillars of the VET offer in the Italian educational system for the fulfilment of the right - duty.



For the purposes of the project ToVET, SCF and ENAC will treat only the VET offer explained in points b and c.

As far as the three/four years programmes (point b and c) are concerned their competence frameworks are established at national level (QNQ). However, the key competences in these curricula are NOT regulated at national level but it is up to the Regional Governments to rules/set/control them.

During the last State Regions Conference of 18 December 2019, the participants have agreed to standardize the key competences on a national basis in order to have similar guidelines in all the Regions.

With reference to the new Italian VET curricula published on 1st August 2019 the key competences are currently underlying in the technical competences, but not visible and explicit. More explicit remains the correlation between the framework of basic skills (cultural and personal competences) and the key competences of Racc. 2018.

As per today, there isn't a national agreement on the link of key competences to the technical competences and national guidelines for the "evaluation" of key competences. Therefore, it is up to the VET Institute and/or the single trainer/teacher to decide how to develop such competences in the students and evaluate them.

In the VET system the key competences are NOT explicitly visible in the framework of the technical and general competences. As mentioned above, it is the VET center (or the trainer within the VET center) who chooses to orient learning by promoting the achievement of "tasks" whose execution requires skills and behaviors related to the key competences (in other words, in order to carry out / accomplish a specific task or project students have to use key competences).

How are the key competences displayed/visible in your country's vocational qualifications?

Separate modules.

Are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised as part of the qualifications?

No.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised?

The last legislative reference for the certification of key competences is the Ministry Decree 139 of 2007. It is a certification of basic skills acquired in compulsory education, which however does not certify key competences up to the European Racc 2018.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences assessed?

In tests organised and conducted by VET organisers themselves.



How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences accredited as part of the qualification?

A separate note/mention in the certificate.

Comments

In the Italian VET system, there is no evaluation system which officially recognizes the key competences developed by the students. It is possible to assess technical and basic competences, declined on the basis of the progressive autonomy and assumption of responsibility of the learner.

In 2017 the National Institute for the Analysis of Public Policies (INAPP) commissioned the experimentation of an assessment model of 4 key competences (initiative, learning to learn, cultural expression, citizenship) within the Italian VET system. SCF coordinates this experimentation promoted by ISRE (Istituto Salesiano Ricerca Educativa - Salesian Institute for Educational Research) and supervised for the scientific-methodological part by Italia Forma. The two-year pilot project involves 1500 students enrolled in the first years of VET pathways in different Italian regions and foresees the realization of “real tasks” for the evaluation of the 4 key competences mentioned above.

The experimentation will be completed at the end of 2020 and will lead to the realization of:

- a methodological model for the evaluation of key competences
- frameworks and declinations of key competences
- tools for the elaboration of reality tasks
- observation and evaluation grids.

The results of this pilot project will be useful to understand the sustainability of the model and the conditions for further development of tools and methods applicable to the whole VET cycle.

Spain

The new curricula advancing towards a modern, future-oriented VET, with a permanent offer of new degrees and with 200,000 new places in four years. They try to ensure that citizens have a degree, a professional training that allows them to overcome these disruptive changes that we are experiencing in our globalized society.

Competences are conceptualized as a “know-how” that is applied to a diversity of academic, social and professional contexts. In order for the transfer to different contexts to be possible, an understanding of the knowledge present in the competences and its connection with the practical skills or abilities that integrate them are indispensable.

Visibility is very clear since the vocational training curriculum is divided into cycles, basic, intermediate and higher, and these, in turn, are structured in modules and didactic units according to the type of competence in question.

How are the key competences displayed/visible in your country's vocational qualifications?



Separate modules.

Are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised as part of the qualifications?

Yes.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised?

They are a part of the qualification of the different subjects. The general competence is displayed in the knowledge, technical capacities and attitudes necessary to achieve the learning results.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences assessed?

As part of the vocational skills and competence.

How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences accredited as part of the qualification?

No mention in the certificate.

Comments

No recognition is made apart from competences. Although the new curricula already contemplate them.



Conclusions

It is a complex process to embed key competences to VET. It involves the introduction or adaptation of policies both to improve the quality of education and to ensure that learning and teaching reflect the needs of individuals and society alike. There are no Europe-wide analyses of the integration of key competences into VET even though there is an increasing attention to them. (Cedefop 2020, 25–26.) This is also evident in this small-scale research.

All three partner countries have national curricula in VET. There are however some differences on how the key competences are visible in these curricula. In Finland and Spain, they are included in the curricula on the national level, but in Italy they are not visible. The visibility differs a bit also in Finland and Spain. In Finland the key competences are included in the vocational and in the general subjects whereas in Spain they are separate modules. Also, the recognition of these competences varies. Again, in Finland and Spain, they are recognised as part of the qualifications but not in Italy.

Even though the European Council has given the recommendation on the Key Competences already in 2018, there is still great variety of how they are implemented or even understood in different countries. The next step of ToVET project is to gather first-hand information from the practitioners in VET. A primary survey will be conducted in the winter 2020-2021 to gather concrete examples and good practices on how the key competences are embedded in the activity and procedures of VET institutes in Finland, Italy and Spain.

It is however already clear according to the results of this small-scale study that there is a need for a guide on how to assess and accredit the key competences in VET. Similarly there is also a prominent demand for a method to showcase the competences an individual has achieved during her/his life whether it is through formal school education or informal or non-formal learning.



References

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Annexes

Annex 1. Key competences in VET education survey



1. Choose your country

- Finland
- Spain
- Italy

2. Do you have a national curricula in Vocational Education and Training?

- National
- Regional
- Local or VET provider specific

3. Any comments on national curricula.

Enter your answer

4. How are the key competences (check the key competences through this link) displayed/visible in your country's vocational qualifications?

- Separate modules
- Written in the vocational subjects
- Written in the general subjects
- They are not displayed at all

5. Any comments on the visibility of key competences in your country's vocational qualifications.

Enter your answer



6. Are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised as part of the qualifications?

- Yes
 No

7. How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences recognised?

Enter your answer

8. How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences assessed?

- As part of the vocational skills/competence
 As a separate project or similar
 In national tests
 In tests organised and conducted by VET organisers themselves

9. How are the skills and knowledge associated with the key competences accredited as part of the qualification?

- A separate grade/mark in the certificate
 A separate note/mention in the certificate
 No mention in the certificate

10. Any comments on the process of recognition, accreditation and assessment.

Enter your answer

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