

EUROPEAN POLICY COHERENCE REPORT

Lifelong Learning Platform, August 2023

Table of content

.....	1
Table of content	2
INTRODUCTION	5
Why are transversal skills policies needed in Europe?	5
Skills or competences?	7
Transversal Skills and Competences for life and work.....	9
Why do we need coherence in skills policies in Europe?.....	10
What is policy coherence?	10
TRANSVAL-EU research	13
TRANSVAL-EU project.....	13
Scope of the research.....	14
Our research methodology	15
Summary table of the policies	17
PANORAMA OF RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES FOR SKILLS-RELATED POLICIES IN EUROPE.....	19
EU institutions	19
European Commission	19
European Parliament.....	23
Council of the European Union	24
EU institutions with a consultative role	24
EU bodies, agencies and relevant international organisations.....	26
EU Bodies and Agencies	26
European and international organisations	28
Multilevel and multi-stakeholder cooperation	29
Horizontal cooperation	30
Vertical cooperation.....	33
Multilevel coherence and cooperation for skills policies.....	34
POLICY REVIEW.....	35
EU Policies - Before 2020	35
Key competences for lifelong learning.....	36
The decade of competence frameworks (2010-2020).....	37
Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning.....	39
Guidance policies	40

Upskilling pathways policies.....	41
EU Youth strategy 2019-2027	42
EU policies - After 2020	44
Umbrella policies.....	44
Sectoral policies.....	50
EU Skills and competences policies and initiatives	53
Post-2020 Competence frameworks, classification and taxonomies	53
European Year of Skills 2023	58
EU Validation and guidance policies	59
2012 Recommendation on VNFIL follow-up policies	59
MONITORING AND REPORTING	66
Education and Training monitor	66
European Semester	67
National Recovery and Resilience Plans.....	68
Mid-term reviews.....	69
Reports and recurring publications.....	69
Evaluation studies	70
Challenges in monitoring and evaluation	71
Conclusions.....	73
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY-MAKERS	77
EU Law Glossary	79
Tables	79
REFERENCES	80
TRANSVAL-EU Publications	80
EU Policies	80
Bibliography and Web sources.....	83
ANNEXES.....	88
Annex 1: Non-exhaustive list of transversal skills and competences mentioned in EU policies and initiatives	89
Annex 2: Mentions of policy coherence and related terms in reviewed policies.....	90

Main author

Pauline Boivin, Lifelong Learning Platform.

With the support of all TRANSVAL-EU partners.

This project has been funded with the support of the Erasmus+ programme under grant agreement No 626147-EPP-1-2020-2-AT-EPPKA3-PI-POLICY.

This publication reflects the views only of the author, and the Agency and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

INTRODUCTION

“46 percent of the adult population in Europe needs up-skilling and re-skilling (that's some 128 million people)” (Cedefop, 2020)

Why are transversal skills policies needed in Europe?

Transversal skills and competences (TSCs) are skills and competences that can no longer be ignored. Yet, their integration into European and national policies remains limited and fragmented. This has been shown already in our first policy and practice research report, the TRANSVAL-EU - *European State of the art Report* (Looney et al., 2021).

Influential international organisations and consultancy companies across Western countries stress their importance as “skills for the 21st Century” (Fadel, 2012), “top 10 job skills of tomorrow” (World Economic Forum, 2020) or demonstrate with data collected through job vacancies to which extent they matter for employers (Chaparro Pérez et al., 2023). Although not European, the US-based Burning Glass survey is quite telling on what skills are more needed in the labour market, an insight that is likely to apply as well to the European context. Interestingly but maybe not surprising, Information and Technology (IT) skills do not rank first. This can simply be explained by the fact that the very nature of TSCs is based on the fact that they can be applied (and hence, needed) in a larger number of (job) contexts compared to technical (or job-specific) skills.

Another global perspective on skills needs is brought by the McKinsey Global Institute. They developed a Workforce Skills Model forecasting an increasing importance of social and emotional skills and higher cognitive skills as a response to automation (Mc Kinsey, 2018). Those findings are confirmed by the previous editions of the World Economic Forum *Future of Jobs Survey Report* (2020a, 2023a) which states: “*Analytical thinking and creative thinking remain the most important skills for workers*” nowadays. The 2020 edition included a *Forecasts for Labour Market Evolution in 2020-2025* on “Emerging and declining skills”. Figure 27 of their Report showed the “*top skills and skill groups which employers see as rising in prominence in the lead up to 2025. These include groups such as critical thinking and analysis as well as problem solving, which have stayed at the top of the agenda with year-on-year consistency. Newly emerging this year are skills in self-management such as active learning, resilience, stress tolerance and flexibility.*”

Top 10 skills of 2023

1. Analytical thinking
2. Critical thinking
3. Resilience, flexibility, and agility
4. Motivation and self-awareness
5. Curiosity and lifelong learning
6. Technological literacy
7. Dependability and attention to detail
8. Empathy and active listening
9. Leadership and social influence
10. Quality control

(Future of Jobs 2023, World economic forum)

OECD Skills Outlook publications and the Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) surveys also demonstrate the importance of transversal skills such as problem solving and social interactions at work. The OECD and World Bank Skills Needs Indicator showed back in 2013 that literally all basic content skills (reading, numeracy, problem solving) were in short supply in almost all Member States. On the other end of skills spectrum, the OECD Skills for Jobs Database (2018) showed an increased demand for high-level cognitive skills¹, related to reading, understanding and processing information, and processing information and ideas. However, the EU has relatively few (10%) adults who perform at the highest level in literacy, numeracy and digital skills according to the data collected by the Survey of adult skills (PIAAC 2012, 2015, 2018), again with some significant differences between and within the Member States.

Cedefop, the European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training, produced a research paper highlighting the importance of “Key competences in initial vocational education and training: digital, multilingual and literacy” (2021): *“Key competences are important for personal development, employment, integration into society and lifelong learning. They are transversal and form the basis for all other competences. Acquiring key competences is possible through various learning pathways, including vocational education and training (VET). However, little is known at the European level of how VET supports the key competence development.”*

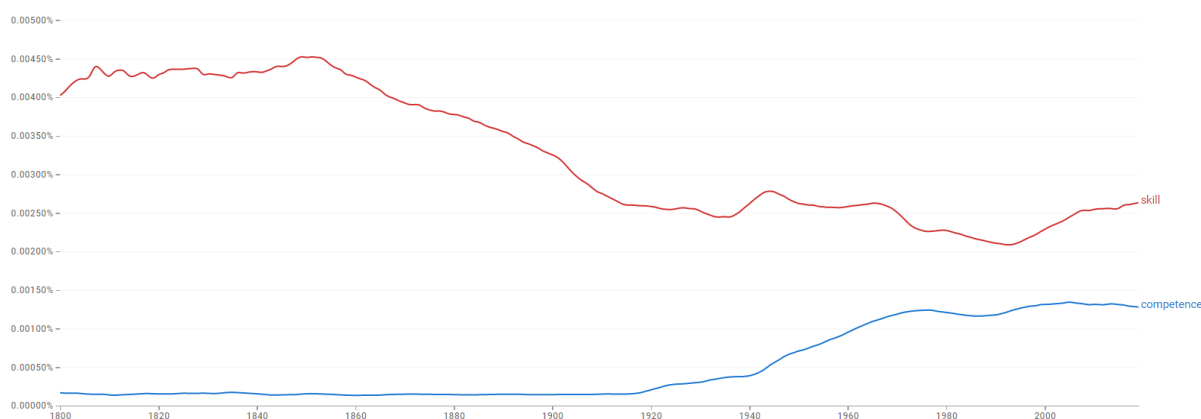
Besides job studies, best-selling books “The Global Achievement Gap: Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship -- and What We Can Do About It by Wagner (2014) or “21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times” by Trilling and Fadel (2009) and academic studies also confirm the increasing importance (and awareness) of some transversal skills for instance of social skills as shown by David Deming in “The Growing

¹ Average across OECD countries between 2004-2014.

Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market” (2017), and in some sectors such as in engineering education (Devika et al., 2020).

Skills or competences?

In the graph below we see that the term “competence” is a relatively recent one, despite its ambiguity (besides being used as a synonym of skills, it can mean to have the responsibility of something). The term was barely mentioned in the printed publications scanned by Google N-Gram tool² until 1920 while the occurrence of skills was already comparatively significant from the start of the scale (i.e., year 1800). The use gap between the terms “skills” and “competences” reduced from the 1980s onto recent years, however “skill” remained a slightly more popular term (at least in language printed sources monitored by Google N-Gram)³.

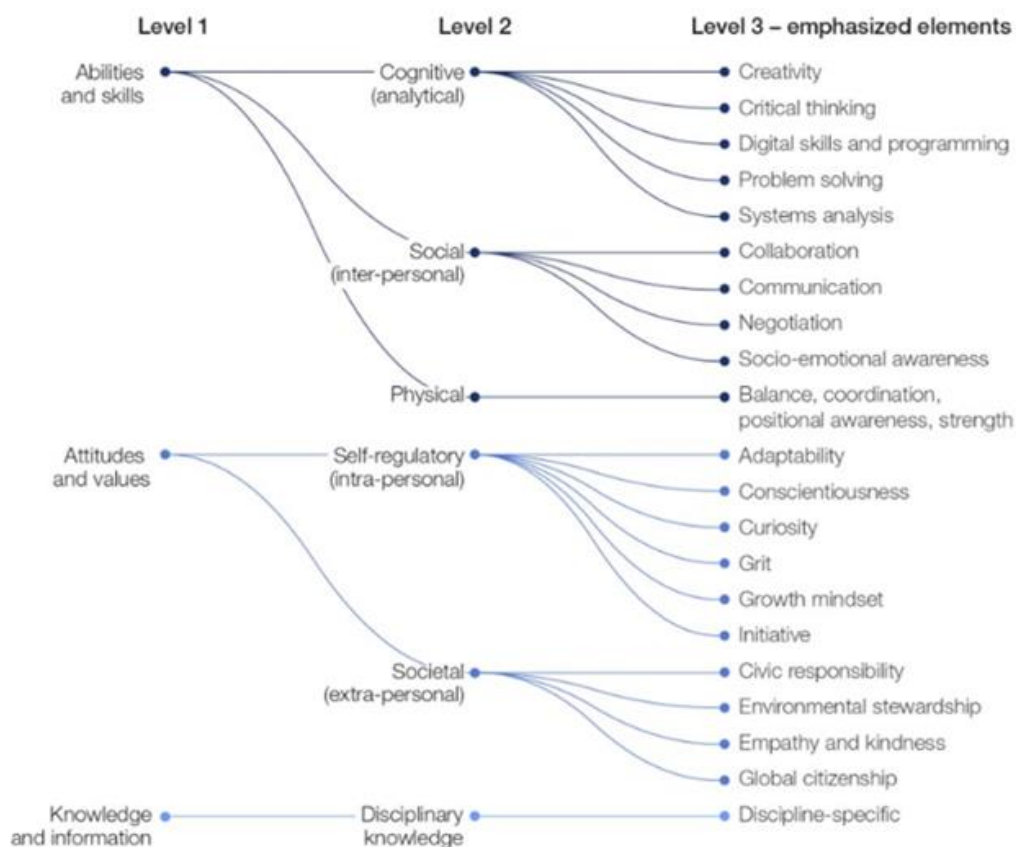


Google N-Gram: Skill and competence (1800-2019)

The World Economic Forum identified that education providers (on the supply side) and the business community (on the demand side) do not have a common language when it comes to talking about skills (2023b) which is seen as essential to drive the skills agenda forward. For this reason, they developed the Education 4.0 framework as a taxonomy built on three aptitudes: (1) abilities and skills, (2) attitudes and values, and (3) knowledge and information (see chart below).

² The Google Ngram Viewer or Google Books Ngram Viewer is an online search engine that charts the frequencies of any set of search strings using a yearly count of n-grams found in printed sources published between 1500 and 2019 in Google's text corpora (source: Wikipedia).

³ A decrease of mentions of a word does not necessarily mean a decrease of use in absolute terms as the occurrence is relative to the amount of published literature, which has been increasing in absolute terms in the last Century.

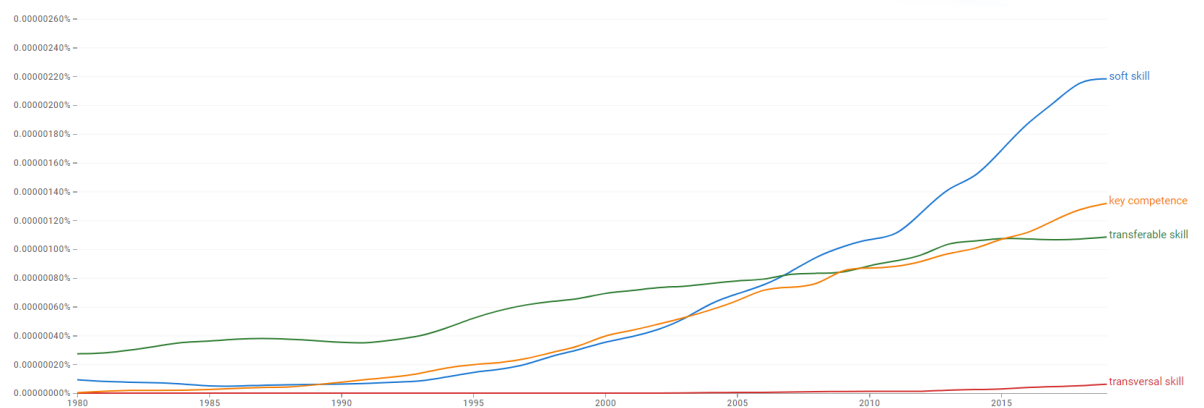


Today, there are a plethora of terminologies⁴, of which some would say refer to different concepts and for others, are synonyms. This could partially be explained by different terminology traditions in national languages. In any case, it is assumed here that substitutive terms to transversal skills and competences refer to a type of skills (or competences) which is equivalent in meaning and defined by its transversal nature across contexts and jobs.

In our Report, we make the assumption that the multiplicity of terminologies that non-exhaustively includes “transferable skills, soft skills, generic skills, core skills, life skills, key competences, cross-cutting skills (...)” can create confusion and be detrimental in policy terms. We conclude that it would be better to choose one concept in order to have clearer and better communication between policy-makers, experts and practitioners in education and employment realms.

The Graph below shows a selection of different synonym concepts and their differentiated but increasing use in the last decades.

⁴ Just reading one paragraph of the World Economic Forum Future of Jobs (2020a, p.35-36) can be unsettling and illustrative. First it mentions “key competences”, then “cross-functional skills”, then “cross-cutting skills”. One can assume those concepts convey the same meaning.



Google N-Gram: 1980-2019

We chose the terms “transversal skills and competences” (TSCs) in order to use the European Skills, Competences, and Occupations (ESCO)’s definition and concepts⁵ and because of the potential of their choice to be spread throughout European countries given that ESCO terminologies are already available in many European languages. In addition, the EU Skills agenda’s wording choice (a policy which is one of the main policies for skills in the EU and one that is investigated in this Report) is “transversal skills”.

Transversal Skills and Competences for life and work

The previously mentioned studies emphasised the importance of those skills and competences for the labour market and employers, however, following the direction chosen by the EU work on key competences for lifelong learning, we consider in this Report that TSCs are not solely neither needed nor applying to work but also for the life of individuals. TSCs are needed for the economy of today and tomorrow, particularly, in the context of the twin transitions (green and digital), but also for individuals’ participation in the society (personal development⁶, active citizenship, etc). As a consequence, **the integration of TSCs is not just relevant for labour market policies, but for a wider range of policies that belong to the more social realms**. Our introductory references show there is momentum for transversal skills. At the same time, this Report makes an assumption that there is a slow integration of TSCs across policies from policy-makers and our aim for this research is to verify the validity of this assumption.

Transversal skills and competences are acquired throughout lifelong and lifewide learning and thus, in many learning environments such as non-formal learning providers in the youth sector and civil society more broadly, school, higher education, adult and vocational education and

⁵ A few years ago, an ESCO expert group composed of terminology experts was setup to reflect on transversal skills and they decided not to choose between “skills” or “competences” to avoid lengthy terminological debates. The authors adopt the same position.

⁶ WEF, Future of Jobs Report, 2020 uses Coursera data to show that there is also an increase of the demand for courses that develop skills where the aim is personal development.

this represents a diverse pool of potential target groups for skills policies. To this date, research has shown that transversal skills are mostly acquired in non-formal and informal learning environments (e.g. at work, in volunteering, youth work, etc): *“Indeed, throughout most of human history, the vast majority of individuals’ learning and development has occurred outside of educational provisions”* (Billett, 2014).

In policy terms, that means policy-makers need to look at skill and competences development across a wide range of policies, beyond formal education, using a lifelong and lifewide perspective on learning.

In order to further develop TSCs we first need to be aware of them. While awareness on TSCs is growing, the main issue that the TRANSVAL-EU project has been working on, is on how to make them more visible, thus intelligible and captured. Policies also have to address this. How to make visible the competences and skills learned through non-formal learning and informal learning, thus assessable and transferable?

This is where guidance and the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) provisions and systems have a role to play. VNFIL and guidance are a tool for facilitating lifelong and lifewide learning (Cedefop, *Guidelines on VNFIL*, 2023). VNFIL focuses on non-formal learning and informal learning with the aim of making all learning visible and therefore, transferable. Guidance supports individuals’ learning pathways and includes elements of validation such as with the identification of competences (e.g., skills audits).

TSCs are hence at the core of this Report which will look into their reference in recent European (and especially EU) policies. We will look specifically at the “coherence” issue.

Why do we need coherence in skills policies in Europe?

As shown previously, skills and competences are a transversal issue from the policy perspective. They are relevant beyond employment and education policies, for instance, in industrial policies, social policies, labour market, migration, and sector-specific policies such as, agriculture, twin transitions (green and digital education), sports and culture (as non-formal and informal learning environments), as well as for lifewide learning sectors (formal, non-formal and informal) and all age groups (from childhood to senior education). This calls for coordination and coherence between the different institutions responsible for these policies, at multiple levels and across policy departments.

What is policy coherence?

Policy coherence is a concept which has mostly been developed in the context of EU cooperation and development policies. It is also a key criteria for “better regulation” as set by

the European Commission for the evaluation of EU policies. In education and skills policies, it is interesting to analyse its occurrence as well the occurrence of closely related concepts.

Policy coherence refers to how policies are connected between them and across silos, avoiding overlap and inefficiencies. It does not just happen by default. It implies a set of collaborative and knowledge-sharing practices between the responsible authorities in charge of the policy, their institutions and the staff in the institutions (the policy-makers). It is dependent on this cooperation to materialise in the policy texts.

The OECD worked on the topic of policy coherence in the context of the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (Policy coherence for sustainable development, 2017). Their work gives us a better understanding of what constitutes a policy coherence framework. It looked into three areas: Strategic framework, Coordination mechanism and institutions; Specific cross-sectorial action plans; and Multilevel cooperation. They identified eight “building blocks” for policy coherence: Political commitment and leadership, Integrated approaches to implementation, Intergenerational timeframe, Analyses and assessments of policy effects, Policy and institutional coordination, Stakeholder participation, Monitoring and reporting.

For this Report, we will take inspiration from the work of OECD with minor adaptations: “intergenerational timeframe” is replaced with “temporal coherence”, an aspect in which we will slightly look into. “Analyses and assessments of policy effects” will be included in the EU policy notion of “Monitoring and reporting” to which we will add the notion of “policy evaluation”.

Policy coherence was set as one of the five dimensions of EU evaluation for its policies along with “relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, and EU added value”. The recently updated *Better regulation Guidelines* (European Commission, 2021) justified a coherent approach as “*EU laws and regulation cannot be adopted in isolation.*” The EC policy-makers created an accompanying Toolbox that specified that “*Coherence across different policy domains and between related policy instruments is essential*”. Indeed, “*New initiatives, impact assessments, consultations and evaluations should be prepared in cooperation with all relevant services in the framework of interservice groups.*”

The Toolbox provided justification for seeking policy coherence (p.408): “*The evaluation of coherence involves looking at how well (or not) different interventions, EU/international policies or national/regional/local policy elements work together. It may highlight areas where there are synergies which improve overall performance or which were perhaps not possible if introduced at national level; or it may point to tensions e.g., objectives which are potentially contradictory, overlapping or approaches which are causing inefficiencies.*”

It defined two sorts of coherence:

- Checking ‘**internal**’ coherence means looking at how the various components of the same EU intervention operate together to achieve its objectives, e.g., the different articles of a piece of legislation, different actions under an action plan.

- Checking '**external coherence**' means that *"similar checks can be conducted in relation to other ('external') interventions"* those can be from same policy fields (e.g. skills policies, guidance, etc) or from related areas (such as education and training, employment, youth, migration) and policy initiatives and tools (EQF, Europass, Youthpass and European instruments). This includes (again according to the *Better regulation Toolbox*) to analyse coherence between general policies and their overarching goals (e.g., EPSR, EU skills agenda) and specific policies (e.g. Council Recommendation on microcredentials). Under external coherence, it also covers what we would call the **"vertical coherence"** i.e., *"the compliance with national policies or international agreements/declarations (...)"*.

For this Report, we take inspiration from both the publications of the EC (*Better regulation Guidelines* and *Toolbox*) and of the OECD on policy coherence in sustainable development.

Besides coherence, our research led us to consider synonym concepts which are connected: "whole-of-government", "whole-of-institution" and "policy integration". Our analysis will consist in investigating whether these concepts are included in the policies.

A **whole-of-government approach** involves *"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"* (Source: EURO-Lex). The **whole-of-institution concept** has a very similar meaning to the former with the only difference being that it not just applies to governments but to any institution.

Finally, another related concept is **"policy integration"**, meaning the *"management of cross-cutting issues in policy-making that transcend the boundaries of established policy fields, which often do not correspond to the institutional responsibilities of individual departments"* (Meijers, 2004). It took its sources in environmental policy-making as it was clearly obvious, already in 2004, that there was no way of making informed policy without thinking out of silos. *"A wide variety of sectoral policies turn out to have unexpected and often unwanted environmental consequences (or externalities) that were not taken into account in the process of policy-making. Calls have been made to avoid such fragmented decision-making by integrating different, but interrelated policies"* (ibid).

In summary, for our typology of coherence, we will look into **horizontal policy coherence** (mostly the external dimension), which is about the consistency between policies, the coordination across institutions, policy departments and stakeholders operating at the same level as well as (to a more limited extent) **vertical coherence**, which is the coherence and coordination between the different policy levels (EU and national for the European section of the Report and to various extents between EU, national and regional levels for the national Reports). Furthermore, we will look into coherence from a more transversal application, meaning where (in)coherence can also be expressed in terms of **terminological (or conceptual) incoherence** (e.g., in the terminology around concepts of skills and/or competences) and into **historical or temporal incoherence** (e.g. lack of continuity of policies). Limitations for our analysis concern mostly internal and substantial incoherence (incoherence

in the content itself of policies, for instance when goals and content are not aligned). Our research mostly focused on coherence between policies rather than within one policy.

We will look into which concepts - coherence, policy integration, or whole-of-government or institution - is more popular among EU education and employment policy-makers as demonstrated by their mentions in the policy and how the cooperation takes place in practice.

Given the role that the EU plays in supporting Member States in improving their policies and facilitating cooperation, it is evident that coherence, in all its dimensions, raises some interest. The EU is likely to have influence on national policies even if sometimes it is not easy to demonstrate it as it results from soft law effects. In addition to policies, EU funding and programmes give a direction to how national programmes are designed and where funding goes (e.g., Recovery and resilience facility, European Social Funds, Interreg, etc.) but we have partially excluded them from our research. National and regional policy-makers are key for translating EU recommendations into policies and this is why we will also look into policy coherence at the national level in separate National Policy Coherence Reports⁷.

Finally, from the results of our research, we will issue recommendations for EU policy-makers.

TRANSVAL-EU research

TRANSVAL-EU project

Transversal skills are often only an implicit part of the existing validation and guidance process. The aim of the [TRANSVAL-EU project](#) is to experiment on how to make those skills more explicit and to embed the lessons learned in validation and guidance provisions. TRANSVAL-EU proposes innovative approaches for the validation of transversal skills acquired through non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), which were tested in five pilot countries – Austria, Belgium, Italy, Lithuania and Poland.

TRANSVAL-EU aims to increase the knowledge and awareness of validation assessors, counsellors and career guidance practitioners on transversal competences through capacity building. The project strengthens cross-sector cooperation between practitioners, policy-makers and other stakeholders in order to build coherent VNFIL systems. The project life span encompasses 30 months, starting on March 1st, 2021, and ending in August 2023. It is co-funded by Erasmus+ (Call KA3 Policy Reform – Policy Experimentations).

This EU Policy Coherence Report is part of the work planned for the last phase of the project which is looking at policy and sustainability and on how to translate the research results into long-lasting policy changes. This Report aims at contributing to a long-standing impact of the TRANSVAL-EU project towards the implementation of the training materials and recommendations beyond the project lifecycle. Alongside, as part of the efforts to invest in

⁷ Available for download on TRANSVAL-EU website.

the sustainability of the project, the policy recommendations to EU policy makers at the end of the Report, will be widely disseminated at EU level, and will be key to guiding the progress on the validation of transversal skills and competences across the EU member states, as well as its recognition for supporting practitioners in the field.

Scope of the research

With this Report, we want to know whether there is policy coherence in how transversal skills and competences are integrated into EU policies related to skills, validation and/or guidance policies as well as the main education and training policies and some sector-specific policies (e.g., VET, adult education, youth)⁸. Considering that there is not a dedicated EU policy for transversal skills, it requires looking into a set of diverse but related policies, with different levels of relevance, with skills-focused policies being most relevant. We had to make a selection of the policies that deal with skills and/or competences as they are very numerous and there was no possibility with this research to seek exhaustivity through a systematic policy review.

To better understand how coherence in the policy is manifesting itself (as an end-result of the policy-making process), we first have to look into who are the responsible authorities for these policies. **That is because, as shown in the introduction, coordination mechanisms between institutions, policy-making levels and other stakeholders are a key success factor for coherent policies.** Besides identifying responsible authorities (including in the broader European and International context) in charge of skills, education, training, validation and/or guidance policies, our analysis will investigate bodies' and entities' coordination mechanisms and how this supports policy coherence. It will attempt to answer the question on how these institutions, bodies and entities communicate or cooperate as a support basis to understand the expression of policy coherence.

We have decided that our geographical scope area for policies and other influential initiatives in focus is Europe. This is because the TRANSVAL-EU partnership also covers EU neighbour countries (e.g., Norway, Iceland) which are likely to be also influenced by EU policies and because some organisations have importance in the European context but include a broader number of countries than just the 27-EU countries (e.g. OECD). That being said, while it appears important to reference some key publications and studies from European entities, in terms of policies, we will first and mostly look into policies of the European Union.

Finally, in accordance with OECD's building blocks identified above, we believe the aspects of monitoring, evaluation and reporting are important to be considered. Indeed, if they are foreseen by the policies themselves it can help us to assess aspects of policy coherence.

⁸ Those are the policies most likely to be taken "in silos". Because in separate departments, by separate teams.

Our research methodology

After having identified all relevant EU institutions, bodies, agencies and other relevant organisations at European level, we have listed 35 policies and initiatives which could be considered as relevant. We have classified them as “before 2020” and “after 2020” considering the new programming and financial framework of the European Union (Multi-Financial Framework, 2021-2027). A short retrospective policy analysis was seen as necessary to evaluate the temporal policy coherence given the fact that the main policy on Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL) dates back from 2012 and that a few competence frameworks were produced during the decade 2010-2020. However, we do not intend to provide a longer historical perspective as it was already extensively addressed in the *EU State-of-play report* (EIESP, TRANSVAL-EU, December 2021) but the 2010-2020 decade is seen as foundational for the preparation of the EU policy coherence context of the current decade (2020-2030).

For the selection of the policies, we consider their relevance by taking into consideration the following criteria:

- Umbrella or overarching dimension of the policy (i.e., extent the scope, narrow or large) as it is assumed that this is supportive for (and usually) a good determinant of future coherence. Those are policies usually set at the beginning of a policy cycle which presents (e.g., as an Agenda or Action plan) what the upcoming policies will be about.
- How many times are the following words: skills, competences, validation, guidance mentioned, for the relevance to this research scope.
- Sectoral policies (for instance, in higher education, youth, adult, VET, volunteering) are also considered for their interlinkages with umbrella policies, cross-sectoral policies and because of their origin from different policy departments and presumed higher risks of incoherence and insufficient interlinkages.

We focus on main policy documents from the EU institutions such as Communications, Council resolutions, Council recommendations, Action plans, Agendas (see Glossary for definitions in Annex) and from the most relevant bodies and projects when it concerns competence frameworks and mapping (the Joint Research Centre, ESCO). It must be stated that due to limitations, we could not include in our research all policy documents (e.g., we did not consider or analyse documents issued by EU expert working groups).

For the selected policies, our **meta-analysis research** consisted in:

- Does the policy refer to transversal skills and/or competences? Is this concept mentioned as such or by synonym terms? Besides broad terms, are specific categories of TSCs mentioned (e.g., entrepreneurial skills, green skills, digital competences, personal and social competences, etc.)?
- Is the policy referring itself to the concept of policy coherence and/or related concepts such as whole-of-government, whole-of-institution, or policy integration?
- Is the policy interlinked with other policies? Which ones? To which extent are other policies referred to?
- How “sector-specific” the policy is? Which sectors are covered by the policy?

Following the finalisation of the first draft of this Report, it is expected that the lead authors will consult experts and key policy-makers in EU institutions to discuss the conclusions of the Report and support an updated cross-checked final version.

Summary table of the policies

	Policy information				EU policies & initiatives	Relevance for transversal skills and competences, validation and guidance						References to Policy coherence
	Institution	Policy type	Date	Sectors		Skills	Competences	Ratio S/C	Validation	Guidance	TSCs	
1	Council	CR	2012	NFE, IFE	Validation and Recognition of VNFIL	23	13	1.8	35	2		
2	Council	CR	2016	AE	Upskilling pathways	53	24	2.2	10	10		1
3	Council	CR	2018	ALL	Key competences for LLL	52	160	0.3	13	10		1
4	Council	SWD	2018	ALL	Key competences for LLL	274	437	0.6	8	17	7	7
5	Council	RES	2018	Youth	Youth strategy	17	8	2.1	3	2		1
6	COM	EC	2018	Youth	Youth strategy	13	2	6.5	2			2
7	EC	COM	2019	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2020	8	1	8.0		2		2
8	EC	COM	2019	FE, AE	European Green Deal	8	1	8.0				
9	Council	RES	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	74	10	7.4	2	2		1
10	EC	SWD	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	421	31	13.6	38	47		6
After 2020												
11	EC	SWD	2020	NFE, IFE	CR VNFIL evaluation (SWD)	93	4	23.3	386	34		19
12	External	Study	2020	NFE, IFE	CR VNFIL evaluation (study)	195	72	2.7	1286	92	7	96
13	EC	COM	2020	FE	EU Education Area	59	17	3.5	3	9	3	1
14	EC	COM	2020 (rev)	FE, NFE	EU Skills Agenda	269	8	33.6	8	7	10	2
15	JRC	CF	2020	ALL	LifeComp	58	256	0.2	5	5	3	2
16	EC	COM	2020	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2021	7	1	7.0		3		1
17	EC	COM	2020	ALL*	Digital Education Action Plan	78	16	4.9	1	8	1	2
18	EC	PUBL	2020	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2020	80	78	1.0	2	13	2	1
19	Council	CR	2020	VET	Vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness	43	24	1.8	8	4	1	1
20	EC	AP	2021	FE/AE	EU pillar of social rights	49	2	24.5	2	1	2	3
21	Council	RES	2021	AE	Adult learning	38	15	2.5		11		5
22	EC	COM	2021	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2022	24				1		
23	Council	RES	2021	ALL*	EFA Strategic Framework	23	18	1.3	3	9		2
24	EC	PUBL	2021	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2021	144	24	6.0		25		1
25	Council	CR	2022	ALL	Microcredentials	32	9	3.6	12	9	1	1
26	Council	CR	2022	FE/NFE	Individual Learning Accounts	22	1	22.0	18	17		
27	EC	COM	2022	HE, VET	European Universities Strategy	31	7	4.4				2
28	JRC	CF	2022 (rev)	ALL	DigComp	212	371	0.6	12	87	3	
29	JRC	CF	2022	ALL	GreenComp	60	214	0.3		2		2
30	EC	COM	2022	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2023	28				2		1
31	EC	PUBL	2022	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2022	105	74	1.4	1	4		6
32	Council	CR	2022	ALL*	Learning for the green transition and sustainable development	15	11	1.4		2		3
33	Council	CR	2022	AE	Ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality	29	4	7.3			3	6
34	EC	COM	2022 (P)	AE, VET	European Year of Skills	157	7	22.4		4	1	
35	EC	COM	2023	AE	Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age	34			1			

Table 1: Summary table of the policies and initiatives reviewed in this Report.

The table records the number of mentions for skills, competences, validation, guidance, transversal skills and competences (TSC) and synonym terms, and policy coherence terms.

Table 1 Legend

Institution	European Commission (EU), Council of the European Union (Council), Joint Research Centre (JRC)
Policy Type (see also Glossary)	Council Recommendation (CR), Publication (PUBL), Communication (COM), Resolution (RES), Staff Working Document (SWD), Competence Framework (CF), Action Plan (AP)
Date	Revision (Rev), Proposal (P)
Sectors	Formal education (FR), Non-formal education (NFE), Information education (IE), Adult education, (AE), Vocational education and training (VET), Higher education (HE)
Ratio Skills and Competences (S/C)	Ratio Skills and Competences (S/C) is the balance between skills and competences mentioned. The higher the difference (where skills are much more mentioned compared to competences), the darker the orange colour is. A ratio between 0 and 1 means more mentions of competences than skills.

PANORAMA OF RESPONSIBLE AUTHORITIES FOR SKILLS-RELATED POLICIES IN EUROPE

EU institutions

European Commission

The Commission has the initiative of policy proposals. In terms of structure, it is mainly organised with “Directorate Generals” (DGs), sort of EU ministerial administrations or governmental departments which focus on specific policy fields. In the Commission, the two main DGs that have to deal with skills, validation and/or guidance are the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion (DG EMPL) and the Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (DG EAC). Between the two institutions, DG EMPL is attributed with slightly more competences on skills (e.g., it has a dedicated Unit and it was attributed the coordination of the European Year of Skill 2023). Each DG sometimes coordinates a working or advisory group which can gather national member states representatives, experts, and/or other stakeholders (social partners, NGOs, CSOs, etc.).

DG EMPL is responsible for education and training for the labour market policies - in short, any policies that have to do with employment, or vocational education and all associated services (guidance, validation, etc.). It coordinates the Europass Advisory Group, which supports recognition and mobility in the EU.

European Qualifications Framework Advisory Group (EQF AG)

In DG EMPL, the most relevant advisory group for this Report is the EQF AG because it has been working since 2012 on validation. Following the 2012 VNFIL Council Recommendation, each country was invited to submit a one-off report to update EU policy-makers and other European countries on their VNFIL systems design and implementation progress and to include a VNFIL expert in their delegations.

So far, 13 European countries out of 39 EQF AG members - 11 EU countries and 2 non-EU countries (Kosovo and Norway) - have presented a one-off report on their VNFIL systems in the meetings since December 2017 (5 countries since November 2019). This limited number can hamper the impact of this process. This Advisory group is also relevant in the sense that

country representatives update other members on how their NQF is referenced to the EQF. Some countries have included transversal skills and related learning outcomes into the level descriptors of their NQFs. A project group on validation has been set up by the European Commission at the end of 2020 with the aim to contribute to the organisation of the EC Validation Festival and to update the Cedefop VNFIL Guidelines.

DG EMPL is empowered by the Strategic Framework for the implementation of the European Education Area. The DG shares with DG EAC the responsibility of managing working groups which have a mandate until December 2025. The Working Groups ensure mutual learning, share information about reforms of national education policies, while informing EU policy making by providing briefing papers and/or thematic fiches to the DG EMPL or DG EAC teams responsible for drafting policies. DG EMPL coordinates two Working Groups: WG on VET and the green transition and WG on Adult Learning: opening up opportunities for all. The latter was established for the period of 2021-2025 under the European Education Area strategic framework. It is relevant for our research because the adult population is the main target group of validation and guidance policies and services. Adult learning is also for several purposes not just employment and therefore constitutes a policy frame which is relevant for skills and competences development that are also for life and citizenship purposes. This is also highlighted in the chosen priority areas of the working group⁹:

- National skills strategies: “Whole-of-government” national skills strategies 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, to name just a few.
- Skills for Life: Opening up learning environments is key to reach out to all, including seniors and in particular those most in need of access to learning, e.g., adults eligible for Upskilling Pathways. It also helps them develop skills for life, including green and digital skills, and media, consumer, financial, environmental and health literacy. All relevant actors and learning environments need to be mobilised to reach out to all ages and diverse target groups.
- Financing of adult learning: To ensure both adequate supply and take-up of learning opportunities, sufficient and well-designed funding needs to be in place. Member States’ innovative funding partnerships to unlock investment could serve as examples of good practices to be explored.”

The Adult Learning Working Group supports Member States in implementing the EU’s vision for a European Education Area and the objectives, priorities and principles included in:

- the European Skills Agenda
- the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan
- the Council Recommendation on Vocational Education and Training
- the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults
- the Council Resolution adult learning and the New European Agenda for Adult Learning

⁹ P. 80 of the Call for Applications for the Working Groups, 2021.

ESCO (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations)

ESCO is not an agency or a body, but a European Commission project run by DG EMPL. The ESCO classification works as a dictionary, describing, identifying and classifying professional occupations and skills relevant for the EU labour market and education and training (ESCO Website). ESCO supports job mobility across Europe and therefore a more integrated and efficient labour market, by offering a “common language” on occupations and skills that can be used by different stakeholders on employment and education and training topics¹⁰.

An **Expert group on transversal skills and competences** was mandated in February 2019 by the joint meeting of the ESCO Member States Working Group and the EQF Advisory Group to refine and structure the existing ESCO terminology on transversal skills and competences. The two advisory groups observed a lack of terminological clarity in this area, potentially undermining dialogue and understanding. The results are a mapping of Transversal skills and competences (2021) and a full report published in 2022.

ESCO was also in charge of a Report on Green Skills and Knowledge Concepts: Labelling the ESCO classification, one that is relevant for our research considering that it includes transversal skills¹¹.

DG EAC is responsible for all education policies, though mostly its work is related to the formal education sector (e.g., higher education, school education). As mentioned above, DG EAC shares responsibilities over the European Education Area Working Groups with DG EMPL. The WGs coordinated by DG EAC are: WG on Early Childhood Education and Care, WG on schools, WG on higher education, WG on digital education: learning, training and assessment and WG on equality and values in education and training. DG EAC is also working in close cooperation with DG Joint Research Centre, as both were under the supervision of the same Commissioner.

¹⁰ In particular, ESCO helps people understand what knowledge and skills are usually required when working in a specific occupation, what knowledge, skills and competences are obtained as a result of a specific qualification, and what qualifications are demanded or often requested by employers from those searching for work in a specific occupation.

¹¹ Within the transversal skills hierarchy, the five green transversal skills belong to the same transversal skill group: “T6 – Life skills and competences”. Examples include: evaluate environmental impact of personal behaviour, adopt ways to foster biodiversity and animal welfare, adopt ways to reduce negative impact of consumption.

Skill being a transversal topic is also addressed in other DGs but to a much lesser extent:

DG Grow	Industrial policies. Social Economy policies ¹² .
	The Green Deal Industrial Plan. The Social economy Action plan mentions the importance of skills development, entrepreneurial skills.
DG Connect	The DG is responsible for digital policies and therefore, has a say on digital education and skills for the digital transition.
	Cybersecurity skills, European Digital Skills Certificate, the Digital education hub.
DG Reform	Support policy reforms of Member States.
	The DG supports Member States together with OECD on the design and implementation of their National skills Strategy using the Technical support instrument ¹³ .
DG FISMA	Financial policies
	Financial competence framework (with OECD) which is mentioned in our analysis.
DG RTD	Research policies
	Research competence framework (also included in our analysis).
DG INTPA	EU International and cooperation policies.
	Coordination of the DEAR Programme (Development Education and Awareness Raising), including calls for proposals as well as a "structured dialogue" through the DEAR multi-stakeholder group that, among other things, aims to build policy coherence between education and skills strategies in the various DGs, but especially with DG EAC.

Table 2: Examples of other DGs and their role in skills policies (authors own elaboration).

¹² European commission, Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, 9 December 2021.

¹³ As of 2021, the Technical Support Instrument can provide grants to Member States, which can seek the assistance of the OECD. Member States could also use funds from the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+).

European Parliament

The European Parliament structure is somewhat similar to that of the EC in the sense that there are Committees specialised on policy fields (however the portfolios can defer to some extent). The Committee which focuses on education is the Committee on Culture and Education (CULT committee). There is also the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL committee) which deals with employment related issues.

Like in the European Commission, some other Committees can be relevant about skills but always to a lesser extent e.g., Committee for economic policies (ECON committee).

EP document	Responsible Committee	Additional Committees providing Opinions
INI Report on supporting and adapting vocational training as a tool for the success of workers and a fundamental element of the EU economy in the new Industry 4.0	EMPL	CULT
Report on a Proposal for Decision on a European Year of Skills 2023	EMPL	CULT
INI Report Implementation of inclusion measures within Erasmus+ 2014-2020	CULT	EMPL, PETI
INI Report The New European Bauhaus	ITRE, CULT	EMPL, BUDG, REGI, TRAN
INI Report New skills agenda for Europe	EMPL, CULT	IMCO
Ordinary Legislative Procedure Better services for skills and qualifications (Europass)	EMPL, CULT	

Table 3: Example of cross-committee interventions (own authors' elaboration).

EP Committees have their say on the policy of the EC proposal for Recommendations, and sometimes produce their own initiative reports ("INI") and studies. For instance, the EP published in 2022 a study on "Entrepreneurial Literacy and Skills"¹⁴. Since the entrepreneurship competence framework (EntreComp - analysed later in this Report), entrepreneurial competences are increasingly considered as transversal, not just about setting up a new business but a large set of competences which aims to transform an idea into

¹⁴ This document was provided by the Policy Department for Economic, Scientific and Quality of Life Policies at the request of the EMPL committee.

action¹⁵. From the “background” section of the Report, it is said that: *“In this research paper, entrepreneurial literacy and skills are conceptualised as competences relevant for entrepreneurial behaviour across contexts and domains, and reflect the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework (EntreComp). Entrepreneurial literacy and skills (1) stimulate equal opportunities for (self)employment and (2) are a life skill and integral part of lifelong learning, enabling European citizens to deal with uncertainty, be resilient and solve problems creatively and innovatively”*. This is one example of the role of the EP in skills policies and initiatives.

Council of the European Union

The third main EU institution which has a say in education, skills, VNFIL and guidance policies is the **Council of the European Union** (the Council) which represents Member States and reunites with responsible ministries. For instance, the **Council configuration on Education, Youth, Culture and Sports (EYCS)** consists of the Ministers (or State Secretaries) of Education, Youth and/or Culture and Sports. There is also the **Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO)**.

Inside the Council, there are dedicated formations which deal with education and employment. The Council is one of the principal decision makers of the EU and jointly with the European Parliament, has the power to adopt, amend or reject laws (legislative power), which are initiated by the European Commission (this includes Recommendations, Decisions, Regulations, Directives). The work of the Council and its specific configuration is facilitated by the **Coreper** (Committee of the Permanent Representatives of the Governments of the Member States to the European Union), which is responsible for coordinating and preparing the work of the different Council configurations, ensuring consistency of the EU's policies and working out agreements and compromises which are then submitted for adoption by the Council. The members of the Coreper are the ambassadors of each EU Member State to the EU. This body has no decision-making authority, it simply eases the work of the Council when faced with its duties. Similarly, within the Council of the EU, there is an **Education Committee** that takes care of the preparatory work in the anticipation of EYCS meetings. The Education Committee is composed of delegates from each Member State.

EU institutions with a consultative role

Committee of the Regions

The European Committee of the Regions (CoR) contributes to EU policies with consultative opinions. There is a larger policy portfolio for the members of the CoR and the secretariat than with the previously mentioned EU institutions as it has a commission which deals with **Social**

¹⁵ It is interesting to note that validation is not mentioned at all in the EP study and guidance only mentioned once. The terms “transversal skills and/or competences” are also not mentioned as such (neither is “soft skills”).

Policy, Education, Employment, Research and Culture (SEDEC). In this Report, we can mention two relevant Opinions and one Resolution from the CoR which contributes to EU skills, validation and guidance policies.

First, there is the Opinion on the Recognition of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning (CDR 3921/2014, 2014). The CoR Opinion highlighted the different learning environments where skills are acquired and the need to recognise these skills, it acknowledged the many significant regional and national differences in terms of the recognition and validation procedures, it also underlined the need for a package of measures to support step up efforts following the 2012 VNFIL CR for implementation in Member states. Finally, it contributed to the development of a New Skills Agenda for Europe that was included in the work programme of the European Commission for 2016. Early on (2014), it called on *“the importance of acquiring the widest possible **cross-cutting skills**, especially in the area of entrepreneurship”* and *“**ensuring overall coherence of tools and policies**, (...)”*.

Another example of CoR Opinions is the one on **“A New Skills Agenda for Europe”** (2021)¹⁶. It stressed the importance of vertical coherence by reinforcing the focus on the regional level, including during the progress assessment and evaluation of the *“the new Skills Agenda and VET policy”*. This Opinion also evoked one TSCs category: *“**behavioural skills pertaining to information, digital and media literacies**”*, and those were the closest to the notion of transversal skills. The Opinion Rapporteur also referred many times to *“new skills”* but with a focus on digital skills. In that regard, one can say the Opinion does not appear to integrate the recommendations from the EU Skills agenda (2020).

The third example of a policy document from CoR is its **Resolution on the European year of skills 2023** (RESOL-VII/026). Compared to the two previously mentioned Opinions, it referred to transversal skills more explicitly: *“Believes that including basic skills, which are transversal and complementary to green and other life skills, in all training and Vocational Education and Training (VET) programmes will lead to greater social resilience and lifelong employability and an empowered workforce (...);”* and *“Calls for appropriate measures to further recognise the competences learned through non-formal education and informal learning, and to ensure that these competences can be validated when entering or re-entering formal educational paths or employment, as well as to **encourage transversal skills** fit with the changing nature of employment and to promote language skills;”* Paragraph 26 also mentions citizenship skills.

The Resolution had a higher focus than the other two Opinions examples cited above on calling for more dialogue and territorial focus which is a building block for policy coherence. It called for this in the context of monitoring and progress assessment¹⁷. It stressed the

¹⁶ The Opinion refers to two “reference documents”, one is the Communication on a European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2020) 274 final) and another one is the Proposal for a Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2020) 275 final).

¹⁷ *“Stresses the need for a permanent dialogue between European, national, regional and local partners in order to identify specific local and regional needs on skills. Reiterates its demand for a more territorial focus when monitoring and assessing the progress of the implementation of the EYS;”*

importance of involving local and regional authorities in the national coordination of the EYS2023¹⁸.

The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC)

Set up in 1957, the EESC functions primarily as a consultative body on issues of social policy, education, social and economic cohesion, and health. The EESC gives Europe's interest groups - trade unionists, employers, farmers, etc. - a formal say on EU legislative proposals. The EESC must be consulted before decisions are taken on economic and social policies. On its own initiative, it may also give opinions on matters it considers important. All opinions are forwarded to the EU decision making bodies (Commission, Council, and EP). The EESC can also command studies.

The EESC is structured around 6 sections, dealing with particular policy areas, including the section for Employment, Social Affairs and Citizenship (SOC), responsible for education and training, among other policy items.

Some relevant opinions on skills are:

- Opinion on the European Year of Skills 2023 (2022)
- Opinion on how to promote, based on education and training, from a lifelong learning perspective, the skills needed for Europe to establish a more just, more cohesive, more sustainable, more digital and more resilient society (2021),
- Opinion Towards an EU strategy for enhancing green skills and competences for all (2020)
- Opinion on the Updated Skills Agenda (2020).

Due to limitations in our research, we will not further analyse policy documents coming from these two consultative institutions (EESC and CoR).

EU bodies, agencies and relevant international organisations

EU Bodies and Agencies

Some EU bodies and/or agencies are also extremely relevant in the context of our research. They either produce research, studies and publications, or help to foster cooperation between stakeholders in the European Union.

¹⁸ "20. Welcomes the proposal of setting up meetings of national coordinators to organise the running of the EYS, while ensuring that local and regional authorities have a say in the framing, implementation and assessment of the Year; proposes that the CoR be included, as observer, to the national coordinators' meetings;"

Joint Research Centre

The **Joint Research Centre (JRC)** is the European Commission's science and knowledge service which employs scientists to carry out research in order to provide independent scientific advice and support to EU policy. JRC is the main organisation responsible for producing several competence frameworks in the pre-2020 and post-2020 decades. We will look into this in the next sections, JRC was involved in at least five competence frameworks (EntreComp, DigComp, GreenComp, LifeComp, and ResearchComp), which will be presented in our analysis.

Cedefop

Another relevant agency is the **European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop)**. Founded in 1975, Cedefop is an EU decentralised agency that works closely with the European Commission, Governments and representatives of trade unions, researchers and practitioners in VET, with the goal of strengthening European cooperation in the area of VET and lifelong learning by providing expertise, for example on validation, learning outcomes or qualification frameworks. Cedefop often publishes studies on validation and guidance (e.g., Cedefop Guidelines on VNFIL and Inventory on VNFIL). They published a study "Coordinating guidance and validation" (2019) which, based on analysis of 13 practices from 12 countries, explored how coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning can be improved.

Eurostat

Eurostat is the European Union's statistical agency relevant for collecting data on a wide range of topics, including skills. Under the supervision of the European Commissioner for Economy, Eurostat is the premier data source used by the European Commission in all its work, making it specifically relevant to understand on what basis the European Commission works on specific policy initiatives. A relevant statistical exercise that Eurostat does for the education and training sector is the Adult Education Survey (2023). It was implemented in 2007, 2011, 2016 and in 2022 (with the results of the latest still being processed). Initially, it covered the participation of adults aged 25-64 in formal, informal and non-formal learning, while as of 2022 it was expanded to adults aged 18-69. Some other relevant data sets for the sector are the Continuing Vocational Training Survey (CVTS) and the Statistics on Research and Development (RS), with some reference to skills also in their EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS), UNESCO OECD Eurostat (UOE) Joint Data Collection, among others.

Eurofound

Eurofound is the EU Agency for the improvement of living and working conditions. Described as the *"tripartite EU agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of better social, employment and work-related policies"* (Eurofound website), the agency conduct skills monitoring and forecasting for the labour market and has a "European Restructuring Monitor" which foresees also resources on how employers support employees in creating skills development plans. Eurofound also publish relevant publications that informs policy, such as

Employment and labour markets Measures to tackle labour shortages: Lessons for future policy (2023).

European Training Foundation (ETF)

ETF is an EU Agency that helps transitioning and developing countries to harness the potential of their human capital through the reform of education, training and labour market systems in the context of the EU's external relations policy. Given that this Report has a broader focus than just on the 27 EU countries, the ETF is a relevant EU agency to mention in regard to skills. The ETF is for instance responsible for producing the Inventory on VNFIL in third countries.

European and international organisations

Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)

The OECD promotes policies to improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world. It provides a forum in which governments can work together to share experiences and seek solutions to common problems. The OECD Directorate for Education and Skills *“helps individuals and nations to identify and develop the knowledge and skills that drive better jobs and better lives, generate prosperity, and promote social inclusion. It encourages countries to compare their experiences and learn from each other, and it accompanies them in the difficult process of policy implementation”*.

The work of OECD on skills and more specifically, TSCs, is very relevant and influential in EU and national policies. It is worth mentioning that they supported some EU Member States in their national skills strategies (in some cases, together with DG Reform at the EC). They also conducted large scale study and survey on a set of transversal skills, such as social and emotional skills (2018) and creativity skills (Vincent-Lancrin et al., 2019). Key publications include the OECD Skills Outlook and the Future of work.

United Nations Education, Science and Culture Organization (UNESCO)

Since its creation in 1945, UNESCO's mission has been to contribute to the building of peace, poverty eradication, lasting development and intercultural dialogue, with education as one of its principal activities to achieve this aim. The Organisation is committed to a holistic and humanistic vision of quality education worldwide, the realisation of everyone's right to education and the belief that education plays a fundamental role in human, social and economic development. The UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UIL) is one of the 7 specialised institutes for education of the UNESCO. The mission of the Institute is to promote the recognition of and create the conditions for the exercise of the right to education and learning. The Institute undertakes research, capacity building, networking and publication on lifelong learning with a focus on adult and continuing education, literacy and non-formal basic education. UIL responds to the concerns of all UNESCO Member States, giving priority to least developed countries.

The UNESCO work in skills development and in particular transversal skills has mostly been under TVET and Adult learning policies. In its International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVETpedia) glossary (2013), UNESCO's definition for transferable skills is the following: *"Skills 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 (for example, organisational skills).*

Another important publication concerning transversal skills conducted by UNESCO is the 'Assessment of transversal competencies: policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region'. This study explores some key transversal skills and analyses the progress made in assessing them. There is no specific work in the field in the European context. However, through the learning cities initiatives many cities across Europe have been working on key competences at large.

International Labour Organization (ILO)

The International Labour Organization (ILO) was founded in 1919 and it became the first specialised agency of the UN in 1946. The main aims of the ILO are to promote rights at work, encourage decent employment opportunities, enhance social protection, and strengthen dialogue on work-based issues. The global framework on core skills for life and work in the 21st century developed by ILO in 2021 is the largest worldwide publication touching upon transversal skills but defining them transversal and core skills for life instead. The report highlights, however, that there is no standard terminology for what is here referred to as core skills. Alternative terms include soft skills, life skills, transferable skills, employability skills, core competences, portable competences, and others. The framework provides tools and a shared vision to member states on core skills and their assessment in order to develop national policies and curricula.

Council of Europe

The Council of Europe (CoE) is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It includes 47 member states, 27 of which are members of the European Union. The CDPPE is the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice within the CoE. The CoE is a stakeholder represented in the EQF AG and it has contributed to European policies, by e.g., producing a Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC) in 2013.

Multilevel and multi-stakeholder cooperation

After presenting the different institutions and organisations responsible for policies (or influential in policies), for which we have already seen some areas of existing cooperation practices, we will now look a little bit more into institutionalised mechanisms for such cooperation at horizontal and vertical levels. The importance of this cooperation for coherence has been highlighted. Besides cooperation between governments and public authorities we also consider cooperation with stakeholders (at various levels).

The two main treaties of the European Union (TEU), the Treaty of the European Union and the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) foresee cooperation of the institutions with stakeholders. Article 11 of the TEU even connects it with coherence.

Treaty of the European Union (TEU)

Article 11

1. The institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action.
2. The institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society.
3. **The European Commission shall carry out broad consultations with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union's actions are coherent and transparent.**
4. Not less than one million citizens who are nationals of a significant number of Member States may take the initiative of inviting the European Commission, within the framework of its powers, to submit any appropriate proposal on matters where citizens consider that a legal act of the Union is required for the purpose of implementing the Treaties.

Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU)

Article 152

“The Union recognises and promotes the role of the social partners at its level, taking into account the diversity of national systems. It shall **facilitate dialogue between the social partners**, respecting their autonomy.

Article 165

1. The Union shall contribute to the **development of quality education by encouraging cooperation between Member States** and, if necessary, by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

Horizontal cooperation

Horizontal cooperation is also called the “whole-of-government” approach in policies. It refers to the cooperation across ministries and political portfolios.

Inter-institutional cooperation and mechanisms

The origins and contents of various EU umbrella or overarching policies, which guide the EU institutions’ work on different aspects of skills development, are described in the Policy Coherence section of this Report. However, as umbrella policies, they require the inter-

institutional cooperation of the different EU bodies to ensure their adequate implementation, monitoring and adaptation. Therefore, for this section, the policies will not be explained, but rather the collaboration required by them will be analysed, with a specific focus on the collaboration needed for the European Education Area, the European Skills Agenda and the European Year of Skills 2023.

When it comes to the **European Education Area (EEA)**, its achievement is foreseen by 2025, with significant work to be done afterwards. The way it operates is defined by a Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area (EEA) and beyond (2021-2030). Based on this, there is a commitment that the EEA will be implemented in accordance with objectives set by other two EU umbrella policies, namely the European Green Deal and Shaping Europe's Digital Future¹⁹. This automatically requires coordination with all the other European Commission DGs, at least on data sharing and updating various targets, considering that they are working on interconnected targets. The framework sets the stage for coordination with Member States on peer learning and good practices sharing, working under the guidance of the Council of the EU and of the Open Method for Coordination in this respect. Moreover, the Framework foresees increased cooperation between the Education and Employment Committees of the Council of the EU on reaching the targets of the EEA and on connecting the objectives of the EEA with those of the skills Agenda. To operationalise synergies between the education and the skills sector of various governments, as these are frequently separated across EU Member States, the Strategic Framework sets up Directors-General formations (to not be confused with European Commission Directorate Generals), which are periodical meetings for joint work between the ministries of Member States responsible to a specific learning sector (VET, HE, Schools, etc). This reunites multiple ministries from each Member States, depending on where responsibilities are shared.

All of the policy initiatives foreseen in the EEA are proposed then by the European Commission, and afterwards subjected to amendments and approval from the European Parliament and the Council of the EU, under the co-decision principle. This already requires coordination across the EU institutions and joint work on the topic. At the same time, the institutions have agreed to collaborate on the mid-term review of the EEA, even if this is not a legally required process under the adoption of the EEA. This collaboration implies consultation and evaluation events and actions organised by the European Commission, which are run in parallel with efforts from the Swedish and Spanish Council of the EU Presidencies to take stock in 2023 of the implementation of the EEA at national level through the EYCS meetings. The culmination of the review in terms of inter-institutional cooperation will be a joint conference among the three institutions and hosted by the European Parliament. It must be highlighted that in the absence of even one of the most loose legal bindings on the mid-term review process, the collaboration remains at the will of specific actors within institutions and cannot guarantee a proper coordination. At the same time, the European Parliament is slightly sidetracked in this process, until the event of the review.

¹⁹ Page 4 of the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) 2021/C 66/01.

Regarding the overall Strategic Framework, there are wide discrepancies in how the different Directors-General formations are organised, with some opening doors to a wider range of education and training stakeholders, while others remaining restricted to the participation of only Member States representatives. A certain lack of coherence can be identified in this context. Clearer guidelines on the organisation of Directors-General formations would better connect the bodies of the different EU institutions working in Education, Culture, Youth and Sports, with those working in Employment, Skills and Jobs. It is important to facilitate their coordination, but it still remains unclear how they work with the other sectors, and how much the different actors within the institutions are empowered to do so at technical levels. More will be said about mid-term reviews in the section on policy monitoring and evaluation.

Though gaps exist in the mid-term review process of the EEA, it must be pointed out that the **European Skills Agenda** does not even foresee an informal mid-term review process. This limits the possibilities of institutions collaborating on its monitoring or in reviewing whether their ongoing collaboration on implementation requires any updates.

When it comes to the **European Year of Skills (EYS) 2023**, it was touted as a collaboration among 22 different DGs of the European Commission (in an early version of the EC Proposal). EYS was shrouded in unclarity over its calendar and actions until a decision of the Council of the EU and of the European Parliament was taken on the initial European Commission Proposal. This has been delayed to a start on 9 May 2023. It is difficult to assess in this context how the different DGs will collaborate. The exact interconnection of DGs is not mentioned in the agreed upon Resolution for the EYS2023, hence, the assumption of collaboration can only be seen in the list of policy initiatives and funding strands that cover skills and are mentioned in the Resolution. The fact that various initiatives tackle skills does not automatically mean a renewed collaboration in the context of the EYS2023. More will be understood on this once the EYS will commence its implementation.

With EU stakeholders

EC Working Groups on transversal topics

An additional way for which the European Commission collaborates with Member States and other EU stakeholders is via Working Groups (WG). These have been set already in the previous Framework for Cooperation in education and training at EU level, ET2020, and have been continued with the Strategic Framework for achieving the EEA. Each Member State has a representative in the WG, while EU stakeholders that applied for a position in the WG have been selected. EU stakeholders have, therefore, the opportunity to hear about the work of different EU governments, share their own findings and outputs, and have a say on the thematic fiches or briefing papers that come out of the WGs and influence policy proposals from the European Commission.

A downside of the functioning of the WGs is that even if they are transversal, and the topics have been mentioned in the European Commission section of this Report, they work in a siloed

manner, with limited inter-WGs collaboration. Considering that the WG on VET and the Green Transition and the sub-WG on Schools: Education for Environmental Sustainability have frequently overlapping topics, albeit applied to different sectors of learning, it is to our knowledge that they do not have joint meetings or joint sharing of results. The sub-WG on Schools: Pathways to School Success has organised a joint webinar with the DELTA WG, but this remains a very rare occurrence. Even more so, some WGs are under the coordination of DG EMPL, while others under the coordination of DG EAC, adding another layer of barrier in terms of inter-WGs collaboration. Moreover, Member States are frequently sending different representatives to the meetings of the WGs, making it sometimes difficult to ensure also a continuous flow of the working of each WG, as relationship-building and catch-up on prior work is required for each session.

In the field of guidance, the **Inter-Agency Working Group on Career Guidance** (IAG WGCG) gathers IAG organisations as well as international social partner representatives (International Organisation of Employers; International Trade Union Confederation) and other career guidance associations (IAEVG, ICCDPP) and regional event partners (professional associations and networks) from around the globe (e.g., Euroguidance for EU). The Inter-agency organisations are: European Commission, Cedefop, ETF, ILO, OECD and UNESCO and the World Bank.

Vertical cooperation

Recovery and Resilience Plans (RRP)

On 2 June 2021, the Commission called the Member States in its Communication on the European Semester “to ensure that the RRP are fully implemented in a timely manner and in thorough dialogue with social partners, civil society and other stakeholders.” It includes a share of 3.5% for skills investments²⁰.

On 10 June 2021, the EP stated the following in its RRP scrutiny resolution: “Recalls that Article 152 TFEU establishes that the Union recognises and promotes the role of the social partners at its level and must respect their autonomy; underlines that adequate involvement of national stakeholders, such as the national parliaments, local and regional authorities, social partners, NGOs and civil society, in the preparation and implementation of the recovery and resilience plans is decisive in the success of the national plans and of the RRF as a whole, so as to enhance national ownership of the plans, ensure the fast, transparent, effective and qualitative absorption of the funds, increase transparency, and prevent overlapping, gap and double funding; echoes the concerns raised by the Committee of the Regions and other stakeholders and deplores the fact that many Member States have not or only inadequately involved regional and local authorities in the drafting process of the plans, as well as the lack of transparency of these processes despite relying on them to channel a large portion of the RRF’s funds; further deplores the fact that in some instances not even national parliaments were adequately involved or informed; encourages the Commission to set up a structured dialogue

²⁰ RRF scoreboard and the EEA Progress Report.

with regional and local authorities and to have a dedicated dialogue with European social partners”.

The European Parliament is pointing here at the lack of vertical coordination, and most likely, of coherence for the drafting and implementation of the RRP. More about the involvement of stakeholders in the Recovery and Resilience Plans can be found in this In-depth analysis by the EP (Recovery and Resilience Plans: stakeholders’ views, 2021).

EU networks

Besides, the EU has set up networks of public employment services (e.g., PES network and EURES), and on guidance (Euroguidance, Careersnet, Refernet). They help to exchange practices and knowledge between countries. This supports the connection between EU policies and the local level. A few years ago, a guidance policy network (European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network - ELGPN) was set-up but it has been silent in recent years. This network did the Career Management Skills (CMS) framework (2015), which is still sometimes mentioned in EU level policy documents.

In addition to the adult learning Working Group at the European Commission, a Network of National Coordinators for adult learning has been set up. The Network of National Coordinators promote adult learning in their respective EU country, provide policy advice and support and gather and disseminate best practices to national authorities.

EU Funding programmes

EU funded programmes play a key role in fostering vertical coherence (between EU objectives and national, regional ones) as well as horizontal coherence and cooperation as they encourage partnerships between public authorities and stakeholders.

Multilevel coherence and cooperation for skills policies

On the EU Skills Agenda, there is some multilevel coherence between EU and national levels with the Adult learning Working Group which monitors National Skill Strategy developments. Additionally, in the frame of the EYS2023, the EC called on the setup of national coordination points in the 27 EU countries as well as a few non-EU countries (Norway, Turkey, Albania, Ukraine, etc) but there is not a lot of information on how coordinators work together and what they do.

On Validation and as a follow of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL), there is some multilevel coherence under the EQF AG and thanks to the production of countries’ one-off reports.

POLICY REVIEW

In this Chapter, we will consider the main policies for VNFIL, skills and competences including **overarching policies** (setting the agenda), **dedicated policies** (where the terms “skills”, “validation” or “guidance” is in the policy title) as well as some **sectoral policies** (those applying to a specific sector or target group e.g. youth, adult education, higher education, vocational training, etc.).

EU Policies - Before 2020

The rationale for including policies produced before 2020 is that unless there was a revision (as in the case of the EU Skills Agenda), policies from the former programming period (MFF 2014-2020) are still valid post-2020 (e.g., Upskilling pathways, Council Recommendation on VNFIL). Key policies were released in this period before 2020: the Council Recommendation on VNFIL and the Council Recommendation on Key competences being some of them and also other landmark work and publications on the EU competence frameworks. We have selected the before 2020 policies for policy review analysis if skills, competences, validation and/or guidance are important in the policy and if the policy has not been updated after 2020. If the policy was updated, then we only consider (i.e. analyse) the updated version after 2020. For instance, the EU skills agenda, although first adopted in 2016, will be considered after 2020 as it was revised in 2020. This is the same approach for the adult learning agenda (revised in 2021).

We consider in this part the most relevant policies and initiatives released during the decade 2010-2020: the 2018 revision of the 2006 Council Recommendation on “Key competences for lifelong learning”, the 2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL, the design of multiple competence frameworks including transversal skills and competences (mostly from the scientific work of the JRC), which is estimated to have contributed to increase the importance of TSCs and other skills related themes into EU policies. Those policies are also considered as a result of increasing awareness of the importance of TSCs. Additionally, we will consider Upskilling pathways policies (2016, 2019) for their relevance with skills, guidance and validation (and the fact that they have not been revised after 2020) as well as the Youth strategy 2019-2027, which was produced early on in 2018 and covers the period of the new programme. The VNFIL policy will be considered both before 2020 (Council Recommendation of 2012) and after 2020 for its evaluation which accompanied the publication of the EU skills agenda in 2020 in order to see whether transversal skills and competences were considered in 2012 (or other related categories of TSCs) and if not, whether the 2020 evaluation seem to compensate for this?

The meta-analysis of policies before 2020 is more limited compared to the analysis for the policies after 2020. We will shortly consider the aforementioned policies in order to have an idea whether they already integrated the existence of the competences frameworks and assess whether there is a demonstrated nature of transversality for the competences included or if they limitedly refer to them. We will also check whether these policies mention similar

concepts to transversal skills and competences and which ones. Our analysis takes a look at the terminology discrepancies, as it is seen as a sign of a lack of coherence between policies.

Key competences for lifelong learning

The **Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning (2018)** is a revision of the 2006 'Recommendation on key competences for lifelong learning' which had identified 8 key competences for all citizens (European Parliament and the Council, 2006). The Council adopted a Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning based on a Commission proposal. The Recommendation identifies eight key competences needed for personal fulfilment, a healthy and sustainable lifestyle, employability, active citizenship and social inclusion:

- Literacy
- Multilingualism
- Numerical, scientific and engineering skills
- Digital and technology-based competences
- Interpersonal skills, and the ability to adopt new competences
- Active citizenship
- Entrepreneurship
- Cultural awareness and expression

The conversation on transversal skills or life skills has been to a great extent animated by the key competences for lifelong learning identified in 2006 and updated in 2018. With 52 references to skills, it goes beyond technical or sector-specific skills, and covers elements such as *"the development of essential interpersonal, communicative and cognitive skills such as: critical thinking, analytical skills, creativity, problem solving and resilience that facilitate young people's transition to adulthood, active citizenship and working life"* (page 3).

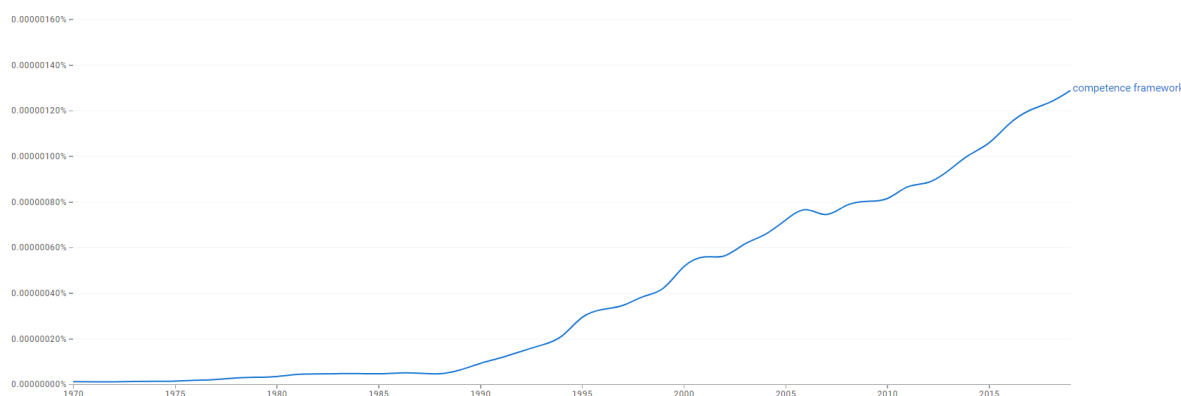
Other examples of a broader perspective on skills are captured by the chosen way to define entrepreneurial skills as *"founded on creativity which includes imagination, strategic thinking and problem-solving, and critical and constructive reflection within evolving creative processes and innovation"* (p.11). The interpretation of abstract ideas, the capacity to engage with cultural and art forms, but also to be part of creative processes (p.11) were also seen as crucial skills and revealed a different take on skills compared to the other policy documents analysed in this Report.

The Council Recommendation makes no reference to transversal skills *per se*, but it is accompanied by a Staff Working Document (SWD). In the SWD, there are 7 references to transversal skills. It connects different terminologies, referring to life skills, socio-emotional skills, soft skills in the context of transversal skills, and it reiterates common phrasing (present also in the European Education Area Communication), namely: *"the so-called transversal skills, such as critical thinking, creativity and problem solving"*. Social competences and learning to learn competences are insisted upon as well in the SWD.

The Recommendation contains 15 references to validation, referring to the European Qualifications Framework, to the validation of competences obtained in non-formal and informal learning environments, linking this with the 2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL and with options to make use of Europass and Youthpass to boost validation. It also includes 10 references to guidance, covering the need to ensure career guidance, the preparation of guidance practitioners and the access to career guidance for the most disadvantaged learners. The document is one of the most encompassing policy initiatives of the EU institutions in terms of linkages to other initiatives. It refers to the European Skills Agenda, to the European Education Area (first announced at the Gothenburg Summit in 2017), to the Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning, to all competence frameworks discussed in this Report, as well as to several other initiatives in the fields of youth, adult and higher education. It is no surprise that this is the main document on the topic of transversal competences within the EU institutions and it demonstrates high coherence as much as it has the ability to foster it.

The decade of competence frameworks (2010-2020)

Below is a graph that shows a steady increase of mentions for “competence framework” in printed publications since the 1990s.



Google N-Gram (1970-2019)

In the EU, the main organisation in charge of competence frameworks has been the Joint Research Centre. It produced over 5 competence frameworks: EntreComp, DigComp, GreenComp, LifeComp, and Research comp (some are not referred to in this Report). All the competence frameworks (as we will demonstrate further below) refer to some extent to skills with a transversal nature (though not exclusively) but they do not always explicitly use these words. The frameworks usually do not distinguish between technical or vocational skills and transversal skills. They show a complex picture (competences) including levels and descriptors. Most competence frameworks agree on the definition of competence being a set of “knowledge, skills and attitudes”, also called the “KSA approach” (De La Torre et al., 2022).

In our research, we are interested in how those competence frameworks impact posterior EU policies. Are they mentioned in the EU Skills Agenda? And other skills policies?

Entrepreneurship Competence (“EntreComp”)

The Entrepreneurship Competence (“EntreComp”) framework was produced by JRC in 2016. A “sense of initiative and entrepreneurship” was one of the 8 key competences identified in the first Key competence Recommendation (2006). The 2016 framework, which was complemented by a User Guide in 2018 consists of 3 interrelated and interconnected competence areas: ‘Ideas and opportunities’, ‘Resources’ and ‘Into action’. Each of the areas is made up of 5 competences, which, together, constitute the building blocks of entrepreneurship as a competence. The framework develops the 15 competences along an 8-level progression model and proposes a comprehensive list of 442 learning outcomes. It can be used as a basis for the development of curricula and learning activities fostering entrepreneurship as a competence. Also, it can be used for the definition of parameters to assess learners’ and citizens’ entrepreneurial competences.

The first 2016 EntreComp publication **defined entrepreneurship as a transversal competence**, which applies to all spheres of life: from nurturing personal development, to actively participating in society, to (re)entering the job market as an employee or as a self-employed person, and also to starting up ventures (cultural, social or commercial). In the 2018 User Guide introduction, there is no longer reference to entrepreneurial competences as transversal competences; however, in the examples and good practices listed there are 11 mentions of transversal skills and/or competences covering 7 national or EU projects.

Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp)

DigComp, or The Digital Competence Framework for Citizens as it is officially called, was first published by the European Commission’s Joint Research Centre in 2013. It has been updated in 2016, 2020 and 2022, leading to DigComp 2.2. As digital competence was already recognised by the 2006 European Recommendation on Key Competence, the topic has been consistently weaved throughout EU policymaking. The first DigComp established digital competence as a combination of 21 competences grouped in five main areas. Since 2016, the five areas are Information and data literacy; Communication and collaboration; Digital content creation; Safety; and Problem solving. The framework can be adopted and used for the development of any learning activity and for assessing the level of competences that learners of all ages have when it comes to the digital realm.

As a competence framework, DigComp, and its latest update, refer on numerous occasions to both skills and competences. It is worth pointing out that even though its references to transversal skills amount to a sparse number of three mentions, several of the competences referred to by DigComp are transversal. The competences that fall under two main areas, “Safety”, on the one hand, and “Problem solving”, on the other, can easily be seen as going beyond technical matters. At the same time, references to engaging in citizenship actions

online develop competences which are broader than simply the usage of digital technologies, as they require an understanding of civic participation at large. In addition, DigComp's fourth dimension contains an extensive list of examples for each competence, covering a broad range of topics which can be interpreted as transversal. There are, however, no meaningful references to validation or to guidance across the competence framework.

DigComp was followed up by the complementary Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu) and the Digital Competence Framework for Organisations (DigCompOrg). Neither is in essence about technical competences, as one builds up the capacities of educators to nurture digital competences while the other looks at the needs of organisations in becoming more adapted to the digital environment. The approach is all encompassing, signalling DigComp as one of the better developed competence frameworks within the EU.

With regards to policy coherence, it is connected, via clear references, with all the other major competence frameworks developed in the recent years by the Joint Research Centre, but less so with most EU policy on education and training. To a certain extent it is natural, as the frameworks were foreseen for universal implementation, independent of specific policy strategies.

Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning

The European Commission launched in 2012 a major European policy initiative for making visible skills and competences acquired outside the formal education systems: the **2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of informal and non-formal learning (VNFIL)**. The policy aimed at providing people with opportunities to validate the skills they develop outside formal education, e.g., in the workplace or volunteering. It provides several principles for the implementation of validation arrangements in EU Member States and is a major milestone in European policy-making around validation of informal and non-formal learning. In the Recommendation, all EU countries committed to put in place national arrangements on validation by the end of 2018. Some of them individually presented and discussed with one-off national reports at the European Qualification Advisory Group (EQF AG).

The 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of non-Formal and informal learning does not mention explicitly transversal skills but name some specific examples that could fall under the TSC category: *"examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child);"*

The Recommendation mentions guidance but only 2 times, which was little at the time when we consider more recent policies and the extent to which the importance of the coupling of

guidance and validation has been stressed. The Recommendation makes no reference to coherence or related terms. In terms of policy references to different learning sectors, it refers mostly to the youth sector (21 times), 5 times to higher education, 6 times to vocational education (including EQAVET) but only once to the adult learning sector.

The Recommendation publication came after the first Council Recommendation on Key competences for lifelong learning (2006) but before the competence frameworks, thus no references on competence frameworks are expected. In the Chapter “EU Policies - After 2020” we will look into how the 2020 evaluation of the Recommendation has progressed for these different fields of investigation.

Guidance policies

At EU level, there is no dedicated policy on guidance in the decade 2010-2020²¹. Guidance is defined as a “*Range of activities designed to help individuals to make educational, vocational or personal decisions and to carry them out before and after they enter the labour market. Guidance and counselling activities can be provided at schools, training and job centres, workplace, community and in other settings*” (Cedefop, 2014, p. 130). However, there are many organisations and networks that work on this topic, and they sometimes publish publications that are about policies. Guidance is also a prominent part of other before and after 2020 policies such as on VNFIL, Upskilling pathways, Adult learning, Individual Learning Accounts, DigComp, and in the Education and training monitors publications.

Regarding the key EU actors involved in policy work, there is the European Commission which works together with the Cedefop’s CareersNet to support career guidance in Member States. There was also a European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN) established in 2007 (but remained silent in recent years) which, at the time, developed *Guidelines for Policies and Systems Development for Lifelong Guidance A reference framework for the EU and for the Commission* (2015). The publication included a part which echoes OECD’s framework areas for policy coherence on “Strategic leadership: Cooperation and Coordination”²².

Cedefop regularly publishes studies on validation and guidance. The study “*Coordinating guidance and validation*” (2019) – based on analysis of 13 practices from 12 countries – explored how coordination between career guidance and validation of non-formal and informal learning could be improved. Results pointed to three factors: a) comprehensiveness: provision of adequate information and guidance before a decision to undergo validation is taken, throughout the entire validation process, as well as after it; b) **coherence**: use of common qualifications or competence standards, occupational standards or other reference frameworks in all the stages of the practice to identify, document and assess skills; and c)

²¹ Resolution of the Council and of the Representatives of the Governments of the Member States meeting within the Council of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (OJ C 319, 13.12.2008, p. 4).

²² See chapter 2; Guideline 5 in this document.

quality of staff, resources, competences, and tools used. The study concluded with policy recommendations on how to improve the link between guidance and validation.

Finally, it is worth mentioning Cedefop's comprehensive update of EU Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices which capitalise on recent developments in national guidance systems and policies. CareersNet experts contribute to the content and sources that Cedefop reviews and makes available to the public arranged in its 22 modular sections. Previous editions of the Inventory (2020, 2021) remain available, and form the basis for the 2022-2023 update.

Upskilling pathways policies

The first edition of this policy was a Council Recommendation from 2016. It was followed up in 2019 by a Council Conclusion. This policy is relevant because of its focus on skills (especially basic skills) and its close links with validation and guidance.

We did not look into the substance of these policies as thoroughly as per the ones for the 2020-2030 decade, however, some quick research allowed us to observe that the two Upskilling pathway policies do not make a large reference to transversal skills, soft skills or any other related concept. The Recommendation amply mentions basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital competence) but TSCs are only mentioned once as "core or generic skills": *"An increasing number of elementary jobs require some core or generic skills (such as communication, problem-solving, teamwork and emotional intelligence)."*

The 2016 CR makes two references to "key competences" (the concept) as well as two references to the 2006 Council recommendation. There is one reference to coherence: *"The diversity of the target group and the fragmentation and complexity of the policy measures in this area often result in a lack of systematic approaches to upskilling the workforce and a lack of awareness of the socio-economic benefits of doing so. **Therefore, coherent policy efforts based on effective coordination and partnerships across policy fields would be welcome.**"*

Three years later, the 2019 Council Conclusions no longer make reference to generic skills. It is to be noted that it is a rather short document (5 pages). Our search for synonym concepts has not been successful either. There are references to basic skills and also a vague concept of "new skills" (which is probably inspired from the title of "A new skills agenda for Europe: working together to strengthen human capital, employability and competitiveness", 2016). The Conclusions include one reference to "key competences" (the concept) as well as one reference to the Council recommendation. There are no mentions of competence frameworks.

Regarding coherence, it calls upon:

- *"a coherent strategic approach to basic skills provision for low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults, built upon coordination and partnerships between all relevant actors involved as part of holistic skills strategies or action plans;"*

- *“partnerships to take a holistic approach, engaging relevant actors, including social partners from across policy areas (social, employment and education and training) to integrate basic skills provision with other services targeted at low-skilled and/or low-qualified adults;”*

The Conclusions took stock of a Staff Working Document which was published that same year. References of TSCs in the SWD are rather incidental despite having a part dedicated to “2.4 Skills addressed” which only focuses on basic and vocational skills. But elsewhere in the document TSCs are mentioned 4 times as “soft, transversal skills” or “competences” as part of project descriptions (e.g., page 23 which describes the Microfinance and social entrepreneurship axis of the EaSI Programme funding mentions that *“many of those projects aim at providing basic, soft or transversal skills”*). It also makes a reference to the 2019 Annual Growth Survey calling *“for stepping up efforts to provide access to upskilling for low-skilled adults (including transversal and digital skills), helping them acquire labour market relevant qualifications”*.

The SWD addresses the issue(s) of coordination (especially from the national perspective of the Recommendation implementation). Coherence is stressed as a major challenge: *“One of the greatest challenges in adult learning is fragmentation and lack of coherent governance that brings together the profusion of offers in formal, non-formal and informal adult learning. Recent analysis by Ecorys (European Commission (2019) Adult Learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU, 2019) found that “fragmented policy frameworks are those where adult learning is not considered to be one sector and where there is generally no coordination concerning the governance of adult learning between different sectors in which adult learning takes place (i.e. VET, Higher Education, non-formal, public/private, PES, in company etc.)”. It can also mean that policy frameworks relate to different levels of governance whereby certain aspects are arranged at national level, and others at regional or municipality level.”*

We will come back to this Upskilling pathway policy with an outlook on its recent evaluation (Chapter on Monitoring and Reporting).

EU Youth strategy 2019-2027

The EU Youth Strategy is the framework for EU youth policy cooperation for 2019-2027, based on the Council Resolution of 26 November 2018. It followed the publication of a Communication from the Commission on “Engaging, Connecting and Empowering young people: a new EU Youth Strategy” (COM(2018) 269 final).

The Council Resolution mentions “competences” eight times (see below) and “skills” seventeen times. There is no mention of “transversal skills” (or soft skills) but several mentions of synonym concepts e.g. transferable skills, life skills, and then specific skills and competences clusters: *“Youth work is known for equipping youth with **key personal, professional and entrepreneurial competences and skills**, such as teamwork, leadership, intercultural*

*competences, project management, problem solving and critical thinking.”; “Therefore, opportunities for young people to experience exchanges, cooperation, cultural and civic action in a European context need to be accessible for all young people. This allows them to develop and strengthen **personal, social and civic competencies**, develop critical thinking and creativity, enhance employability and become active European citizens”; “Promote open-mindedness and support the development of **interpersonal and intercultural skills**”; “Guarantee that education equips all young people with **life skills** such as money management and health education including sexual and reproductive health”.*

The Strategy refers to validation and recognition and guidance separately. There are no references to competence frameworks.

In the EC Communication, life skills are mentioned twice but transferable skills are not mentioned as in the Resolution. The only close mention of TSCs is: “*key competences and skills such as teamwork, leadership, intercultural competences, project management, problem solving and critical thinking.*” The EC document makes reference to the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens.

It is noted that the two documents, the Resolution and the Communication, are using different terminologies even if published a few months one from another. Further on in this Report, it will be interesting from a lifelong learning perspective to explore potential (or lack of) continuity and coherence between the Youth strategy and the Adult learning agenda.

EU policies - After 2020

In this Chapter, we will first look at policies we call “umbrella” or “overarching” policies as we assume that they are decisive to ensure coherence and setting the agenda, then we will look into more sector-specific policies. What we define as “umbrella” or “overarching” are the following policies: Action plan, Strategic framework, Agenda, Strategy. Their scope is broader, they are often published at the beginning of a political cycle (e.g., MFF 2021-2027), they often list the policy plan for the following years hence, supporting interlinkages and coherence. The terminology used for these policies can change over time and is rather diverse. For instance, the terms white papers and green papers were used before but not so much anymore. There is some continuity, for instance, in using the term “frameworks” from ET2020 to “EU Strategic framework”, same for the EU Skills Agenda (2016, 2020). But some policies use new terminologies and refer to an Area or a Pillar.

Umbrella policies

European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR)

The Pillar anchors the policy coherence across the EU and many times is linking all education and training and skills policies. It lists 20 principles or in this case, “pillars” which are proclaimed rights for EU citizens. The first one is about “Education, training and life-long learning”. The EPSR is an Action plan which includes information on EU targets, and different objectives (More and better jobs, Skills and equality, Social protection and inclusion). Looking at the section on “Skills and equality” (p.22), there are mentions of other EU policies: the Recovery and Resilience Facility and its role for upskilling and re-skilling and EU programmes to fund for skills (European Social Funds, Erasmus+, the European Regional Development Fund, and DG Reform Technical Support Instrument) and it also makes reference to validation (page 23). The Action Plan proposes in the fourth quarter of 2021 a Skills and Talent package.

The Annex 1 “Key Commission Actions” (page 42) lists planned policies from 2021 to 2025. It is to be noted that the Plan includes a social scoreboard which includes one indicator about skills, and it is for digital skills. A Review of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan is foreseen for 2025.

The EPSR includes forty-nine mentions of skills, only two of competences, it mentions twice validation and once guidance. It also refers twice to transversal skills:

- *“A key factor of success to ensure that adults are able to engage in up- and reskilling later in life is a strong foundation of basic and transversal skills acquired in initial education and training, in particular among disadvantaged groups.” (p.11)*
- *“Initial education and training, including early childhood education and care, provide the foundations on which to build the basic and transversal skills needed in fast-changing societies; they also form the basis for any further learning and skills development.” (p.22)*

The Plan also mentions digital and green skills. However, it does not mention key competences. The Pillar, which appears to focus mostly on formal education and work-based learning, includes many cross-references of policies but none to competence frameworks, the Council Recommendation on VNFIL (even though validation is mentioned twice), or the Council Recommendation on Key competences for lifelong learning. The sectoral policies it refers to are two youth policies (Youth Employment Support: A Bridge to Jobs for the Next Generation and the Youth Guarantee), VET policies, school (Pathways to School Success) and higher education policies (e.g. Higher Education Transformation Agenda). However, nowhere is mentioned the adult learning agenda.

The word coherence is not mentioned, nor synonym terms.

European Green Deal

The EU Green deal and the legislative package “Fit for 55” are an impetus for policies on the green transition where skills development is tackled (e.g. green skill taxonomy, etc). The EU Green Deal, released in December 2019, is the overarching EU framework to guide the block towards becoming the first carbon neutral continent by 2050. It covers 8 key priorities with one of them being future-proof jobs and skills training for the transition.

Despite having a more economic approach looking at specific industries and key economic sectors for the EU, the Green Deal Communication puts forth mandates connected not just to training (as seen above) but also to education systems as a whole. There is no mention of lifelong learning in the document but several on skills (8 times) and one on competence. A big focus is given to skills for the green economy and the formal education sector including upskilling and reskilling for adults. The Communication outlines the need for an updated Skills Agenda (published a year after in 2020) and Youth Guarantee (also published in 2020), both worked on by DG EMPL. The Communication also mandates the creation of a competence framework - beyond job-specific skills - to look into knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development (the competence framework was published in 2022 together with a Council Recommendation), a file which fell under DG EAC. There is no mention of transversal skills or similar terms in the document.

Fit for 55: Council Recommendation on a fair transition towards climate neutrality

To achieve the goals under the goals of the EU Green Deal the Commission adopted in July 2021 a package of legislative proposals called "Fit for 55" to strengthen the EU's position as a global climate leader by modernising existing legislation in line with the EU's 2030 climate target and introduce new policy measures to reduce net emissions by at least 55% (compared to 1990) by 2030. Within this package the Commission published a Council Recommendation in June 2022 (Ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality) to provide further guidance to Member States on how to best address the social and labour aspects of the green transition.

The Council Recommendation refers three times to transversal skills, always with the goal of preparing adults to engage in more training and adapt to the requirements of the labour

market. Transversal skills are always seen from the perspective of the needs of various economic activities. In this context, two references to career guidance are made, assisting adults to find the training that matches their needs with the requirements of the labour market. There is no reference to validation. The document is skewed towards skills overall, with no references to competences and is dedicated to the working age population. This perspective is reflected also in terms of policy coherence with other EU initiatives as there are references towards micro-credentials and individual learning accounts but no references to the European Education Area, Key Competences for Lifelong Learning, competence frameworks, the adult learning agenda or to higher education policies. On the other hand, it is connected to the European Skills Agenda, and it represents one of the few EU documents on skills that mentions the necessity to link EU work with the national skills strategies.

Council Recommendation on Learning for the green transition and sustainable development

The previous Council Recommendation, which focused more on adult education, was published at the same time with the one on Learning for the green transition and sustainable development. This latter one was meant to cover the formal education sector. It appears to be slightly more balanced in terms of references to skills (15 mentions) and competences (11 mentions), but it never explicitly refers to transversal skills. However, it does refer three times to the concept of key competences and is connected to the Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Some of the skills that it accounts for are ‘problem-solving and collaboration skills; foster critical thinking, media literacy’, and there is a link made to the GreenComp framework. It makes two relevant references to guidance and none towards validation. There are references made to whole-institution approaches, recognising the importance of collaborating across stakeholders. There are 6 references to the European Education Area and one to the Skills Agenda. It takes a broader view than the previous Council Recommendation since it refers three times to youth (EU Youth Strategy, Youth Guarantee and European Youth Portal), one time to adults, one time to VET and nine times to schools.

Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age

Another policy package was outlined in the Communication on the Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age. This Plan is meant to ensure that the EU has access to the technologies, products and solutions that are key to the transition to net-zero while maintaining economic growth and quality jobs. The Communication has 4 pillars, with one focused specifically on skills, by ensuring that the European workforce is skilled in the technologies required by the green transition.

In terms of skills, the Communication focuses heavily on green skills and more specifically green transition technical skills, while also making connections with digital skills. The main target of the Communication is the EU workforce in which the upskilling and reskilling efforts are concentrated. The document makes various mentions of the Skills Agenda and its flagship initiatives: the Pact for Skills, VET Council Recommendation and quality traineeships. The European Education Area is mentioned only once, and the flagships highlighted are limited to the European Universities. Although validation and recognition are mentioned, there is no link

to the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning. There is equally no mention of transversal skills or similar terms.

EU Strategic framework - European Education Area (EEA)

The European Education Area was established as a project to be achieved by the EU on the occasion of the 2017 Social Summit for Fair Jobs and Growth in Gothenburg. The vision was laid out in the 2020 European Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025. This was followed by two legislative documents, the Council Resolution on a strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) and the Council Resolution on the governance structure of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030) which were both approved in 2021. This package of documents established one of the main EU strategies in education and training until 2030. The Communication serves as the content of the strategy, while the two Council Resolutions account for how this vision will be implemented in terms of methodologies, governance, stakeholders and monitoring process. Therefore, the evaluation of the Communication is most relevant for assessing policy coherence between EU initiatives.

The Communication makes reference to skills on 59 occasions while to competences on 17 times. There is a significant focus placed on basic and digital skills within these references, as the publication tends to focus more on formal education and early years in learning, with the updated Skills Agenda being targeted at learning at later stages in life. The references that it makes on validation and on guidance are minimal, but they build a bridge with the 2012 Council Recommendation on the Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning. The Communication is linked to the Skills Agenda in 10 instances across the document, which is natural given how the two have been published as a package in 2020. It must be highlighted, however, that the EEA has more than double the number of references on the Skills Agenda than the Skills Agenda has on the EEA.

The most meaningful elements of the Communication for our policy review are the three references to transversal skills, two of which clearly mention *“transversal skills such as critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity and civic engagement [to be developed] through transdisciplinary, learner-centred and challenge-based approaches”* (p.6).

As an umbrella policy initiative, this Communication is referring to many of the policy actions that will be analysed below, since it has put their development in motion. This is an appropriate example for how the policy coherence post-2020 has been boosted by a better tie in between policies that are anchored in overarching initiatives.

European Skills Agenda

This policy is a Communication of the European Commission on the “European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience” (2020). The European Skills Agenda is a five-year plan to “help individuals and businesses develop more and better skills

and to put them to use” by: strengthening sustainable competitiveness, as set out in the European Green Deal; ensuring social fairness, putting into practice the first principle of the European Pillar of Social Rights: access to education, training and lifelong learning for everybody, everywhere in the EU; and building resilience to react to crises, based on the lessons learnt during the COVID-19 pandemic.

A tool for policy coherence?

The new European Skills Agenda builds upon the ten actions of the Commission’s 2016 Skills Agenda. It also links to the European Digital Strategy, the Industrial and Small and Medium Enterprise Strategy, the Recovery Plan for Europe and policies on “Increased support for youth employment”. The inter-linkages with other policy initiatives supporting the lifelong learning approach will be strengthened through the proposals on the European Education Area and the European Research Area. The overarching aims of these initiatives are to help build a culture of lifelong learning in Europe, strengthen the cooperation with industry and boost the employability of citizens.

The EU Skills agenda is an umbrella-overarching policy, but this does not prevent the initiatives it covers to be designed and progress in silos or independently. It could have defined the skills that are needed for the following years. It does not solve all issues with regards to terminology on skills and competences.

Flagship actions

There are four main flagship actions (out of twelve) that are particularly relevant to the development of TSCs, validation and/or guidance policies. The actions are Action 3: EU support for strategic national upskilling action; Action 6 Skills to support the green and digital transitions; Action 7 Increasing STEM graduates, fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills and Action 8 Skills for life.

As for **Action 3 “EU support for strategic national upskilling action”**, the Commission announces that it will support all Member States “to prepare holistic, **whole-of-government national skills strategies**”. Countries can develop skills strategies with the support from either the OECD and/or the European Commission. Not many National skills strategies have been developed since the EU skills agenda publication in 2020. While it is claimed that as of March 2023, “13 Member States have started developing a national skills strategy and six are implementing theirs” (Factsheet of the European Commission, March 2023), the picture is slightly different when we look at actual strategies in place. This calculation counts countries which required the support of OECD who provided them with assessment and recommendations, but this did not necessarily lead to the development of national skills strategies or policies. According to a report from the EC adult learning working group, Ireland, Germany and Norway adopted a national skills strategy before 2020.

Since the publication of the EU Skills Agenda, our information only shows that four countries are working with the OECD for the assessment and recommendations but that does not necessarily mean that they will develop a national skill strategy (Slovakia in 2020, Lithuania in

2021 and Luxembourg and Bulgaria are currently working with the OECD). It is also to our knowledge that only one country developed a national skills strategy after the EU skills agenda, and it is Poland (Integrated skills strategy 2030).

The **Action 6** about “**Skills to support the green and digital transitions**” foresaw the publication in 2022 of a taxonomy of green skills by the Commission. It was announced that the taxonomy would “include occupational and sector specific green skills, skills that are shared across economic sectors and **skills of a more transversal nature**”. This is also under this Action that a proposal for a Council Recommendation on education for environmental sustainability and a Competence Framework on sustainability were planned (see analysis of these policies below²³).

Action 7 on “**Increasing STEM graduates, fostering entrepreneurial and transversal skills**” is rather explicit. Under Action 7, transversal skills are, as observed for the first time in our policy review, connected to the topic of validation. The Commission plans that it will:

- *“provide a strategic framework for the recognition of transversal skills to support validation practitioners in Europe.”*
- *“develop resources to support validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services. This will include exploration of EU-wide online courses and related micro-credentials for validation practitioners, and establishment of a network of validation pioneer organisations that can share best practices.”*

This is among the flagship actions, what has been missing so far in terms of follow-up and implementation.

Finally, **Action 8: “Skills for life”** does not refer to “life skills” but rather the lifelong acquisition of skills (e.g., in the senior population). In that respect, it refers to the future adoption of the New European Agenda for Adult Learning in November 2021. The Agenda sets out priorities for making holistic and inclusive adult learning available for all, including seniors and those most in need of learning.

Momentum for transversal skills?

The EU skills agenda is obviously the most relevant policy for this report. Why there is unsurprisingly a massive number of skills mentions (269 mentions), comparatively, there is barely any mentions of the word “competence” (8 mentions). Validation and guidance are relatively mentioned a few times (respectively 8 times and 7 times). “Transversal skills” is mentioned as such 10 times, which makes this policy the one with most mentions of these terms. “Soft skills” is mentioned once. “Entrepreneurial skills” is mentioned 6 times. Other specific TSCs categories include critical thinking (2 mentions) and “creative problem solving”.

In terms of coherence objectives, there are two mentions of the concept of “whole-of-government” in relation to the national skills strategies. The Agenda mostly refers to formal

²³ This was done: Greencomp (JRC) and Green skills taxonomy by ESCO and the Council Recommendation on sustainable education.

and non-formal education, without many details on how skills can be acquired in informal learning environments (as opposed to the Recommendation on VNFIL's principles).

The Agenda refers to three competence frameworks: Researchcomp, GreenComp, and Entrecomp. Among those three, one was developed before 2020 and two were developed after 2020 (see sections below). The VNFIL Council Recommendation is only referred to once and with regards to microcredentials, which can be surprising considering that the VNFIL Council Recommendation evaluation was published together with the Agenda and this could be seen as a signal of limited temporal coherence. Key competences are mentioned but there is no reference to the Council Recommendation. There are four references to the European Education Area.

Sectoral policies

New European Agenda for Adult Learning

The adult learning agenda is relevant for our policy review since it is supposed to cover around 80% of the EU population²⁴, also including the senior population (64+). This agenda should cover all sorts of adult learning, formal, non-formal and informal whatever the work status of adults is. The New European Agenda for Adult Learning was published in 2021 as a Council Resolution. One of its five priorities is “the green and digital transitions and related skill needs”.

Relevance and Terminology coherence

In the Adult learning Agenda, there are many mentions of skills (38) and competences (15) which is a good ratio compared to other studied policies. Competences are often referred to in the context of the formula “knowledge, skills and competences”. This seems to be an odd formulation considering the terminology and definition of competences in Key competence policies and other competence frameworks. The concept of ‘Attitudes’ disappeared; it is no longer part of the KSA formula. Validation is mentioned 7 times while guidance is mentioned 11 times, which is a significant rate.

About transversal skills and competences

The Agenda makes no reference to transversal skills and competences²⁵ (including soft skills, life skills and transferable skills as well as specific mentions of such skills), which shows limited coherence with the EU Skills Agenda. There are as well no specific references to concepts that could fall under the TSC category (e.g., entrepreneurial skills and competences, civic competences, personal competences, etc).

²⁴ Most statistics refer to the working age population 15 years old and older, 80% is an estimation based on available statistics.

²⁵ Even though the EC web page on adult learning refers to “transferable skills”.

Policy coherence and references

There are 2 mentions of the whole-of-government concept and some mentions of policy coherence. It does refer to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and the European Skills Agenda, but it appears to be mostly symbolic. There are many policy references in the Annex. Only key competences are mentioned (both as concept and CR) for the competence frameworks. The EU skills agenda is mentioned twice and the European Education Area 8 times. It refers twice to “national skills strategies”.

While the Agenda makes many references to policy coherence it seems to have been one of the most siloed-produced documents in terms of content. Considering its wide scope in terms of target groups (all adults whatever their status is), the sectors it can cover (formal, non-formal and informal), it is regrettable that so little of transversal skills and competence frameworks are mentioned in the substance. Furthermore, this can also strike a lack of continuity with the Youth Strategy (2018) for the same period, a policy which had significant coverage of life skills, civic or personal skills. The EU adult learning agenda, despite the policy references, therefore, presents elements of temporal, external and horizontal incoherences towards other EU policies. It does not seem to be strongly connected to the EU Skills Agenda.

The lack of coherence could be explained by the policy process leading up to the Council Resolution. There was no EP report, no public consultation of civil society and education and training providers. The only institution that published an Opinion was the EESC on the request of the Slovenian Presidency. A more open and transparent process might have led to a stronger agenda that also explores the roles of competences frameworks, among others.

Council Recommendation on vocational education and training for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience

The Council Recommendation on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience was published in 2020. It covers formal and non-formal vocational education (initial, continuous, and work-based learning).

There are 43 mentions of skills and 24 of competences, which is a balanced ratio. Validation is mentioned 8 times and guidance 4 times. Transversal skills are mentioned once: *“Vocational education and training programmes offer a balanced mix of vocational including technical skills well aligned to all economic cycles, evolving jobs and working methods and key competences, including solid basic skills, digital, transversal, green and other life skills which provide strong foundations for resilience, lifelong learning, lifelong employability, social inclusion, active citizenship and personal development;”*

The Recommendation on Key competences is referenced in that quote context. No other synonym terms to TSC are mentioned but specific TSC categories are, such as entrepreneurial, digital and green skills.

There is one mention of policy coherence in such terms as for the content and recommendations, it says that *“Ensuring that the EU policy for vocational education and training is fully reflected in taking forward the EU Recovery Plan, the European Green Deal and the New Industrial Strategy for Europe, the SME-Strategy for a sustainable and digital Europe and is a consistent and coherent part of the European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience, the Digital Education Action Plan, the overall European cooperation framework for education and training and the European Education Area”*.

There are several policy references to the EU Skill Agenda (6 mentions), the Council recommendation on VNFIL (2 mentions), and the European Education Area (7 mentions). As for the reference to sectoral policies, it makes one to the Youth guarantee but has no reference to the youth strategy or the adult learning agenda (which was published afterwards but the former version from 2011 could have been referred to). For school policies, the VET Council Recommendation only refers to early school leaving policy (2011) and for higher education, mostly refers to European Education Area and the Council Recommendation from 2018 on promoting automatic mutual recognition of higher education. There is no mention of the national skills strategies. It makes reference to key competences and Digcomp but not to Entrecomp, which is surprising considering that it mentions entrepreneurial competences.

European Strategy for Universities

In 2022, as announced by the Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025, the European Commission published a Communication on a European Strategy for Universities. This provided a framework for universities to adapt and thrive in the EU while contributing to the development of a European dimension in the higher education sector across Member States. The four main flagship initiatives under the Strategy have been the establishment of alliances of European Universities supported by Erasmus+ covering multiple higher education institutions from across Europe, developing a joint European degree label, developing a possible European legal status for alliances of higher education institutions and the establishment of the European Student Card initiative (a unique European Student Identifier facilitating a smoother mobility experience for the students and institutions involved).

Though not immediately evident how this specific policy connects to transversal skills, it boasts 31 references to skills and 7 to competences, referring (page 7) to the exact same transversal skills mentioned in the Communication on the European Education Area: critical thinking, problem-solving, creative and entrepreneurial skills. It must be mentioned, however, that the concept of transversal skills is not mentioned in this context. The Strategy makes no reference to the Skills Agenda and seems particularly detached from other European Education Area initiatives. There are no mentions of validation (or recognition of prior learning²⁶) and guidance, which can be seen as a surprising element given their importance

²⁶ There are 7 mentions of recognition out of which 4 refer to processes like EQAR and the Recommendation on automatic mutual recognition but none about recognition of prior learning. The rest is on experience of cross-border recognition and recognition of third country qualifications.

for the sector. The Strategy frequently discusses competence development as a means towards entrepreneurship and adapting to the twin transitions.

Digital education action plan (DEAP)

In September 2020, together with the publication of the European Commission Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025 and the European Skills Agenda, the European Digital Education Action Plan (DEAP) was also launched. It is foreseen to cover the period 2021-2027, being a long-term vision of achieving equity and inclusivity in the promotion of quality digital education across all Member States. The Plan is structured on two main priorities: fostering the development of a high-performing digital education ecosystem and enhancing digital skills and competences for the digital transformation. The two priorities are to be achieved through 13 total action points which are linked with both the European Education Area and the Skills Agenda. As they have been published as a common package, the three documents refer to each other.

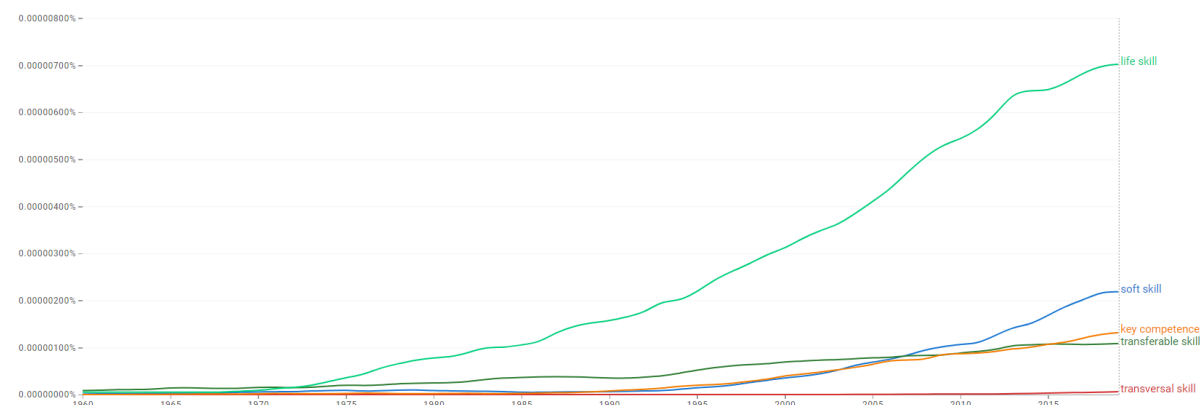
The DEAP is skewed towards skills references compared to competences (78 vs. 16). There are no relevant references to validation or guidance, while the only reference to transversal skills appears in the footnotes and is connected to the STEAM approach to learning. Though not explicit, there are references to some skills which are presented as boosting people's participation in society, resilience, democratic values, or for contributing to more cohesive societies. Such skills can be considered as transversal. For example, the DEAP discusses the benefits of computing education in order to develop skills in problem-solving, creativity and collaboration (page 13), or acquiring digital literacy in order to be more resilient, more active in democratic life and maintain safety and security online (page 13). Adaptability, communication and collaboration skills, problem solving, critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship and readiness to learn are also mentioned across the Action Plan even if not overtly linked with relevant other EU policies or with the idea of transversal skills.

EU Skills and competences policies and initiatives

Post-2020 Competence frameworks, classification and taxonomies

LifeComp

An unexpected finding from our research using Google N-Gram is that the concept of "life skills" is much more popular than "soft skills" in printed publications.



Google N-Gram: 1960-2019

When the European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence, in short LifeComp, was published by the Joint Research Centre in 2020, the references to life skills were mushrooming, as seen from the graph above. LifeComp emerged on the shoulders of this new conceptualisation but also on the foundations laid by the 2018 Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. As all competence frameworks, it has a significant amount of references to skills and competences, but it is worth pointing out that on page 7 it provides an overview of different terms which it sees as deeply interconnected: '21st century skills', 'life skills', 'socioemotional skills', 'soft skills', or 'transversal skills'. "The aim of the LifeComp conceptual framework is to establish a shared understanding, and a common language on the "Personal, Social and Learning to Learn" competences" (page 8).

At the same time, it discusses concepts such as knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development (page 13), critical skills for coping with stressful situations and conflicts (page 30), career management skills (page 35), skills needed to be able to make informed health-related decisions (page 38), collaboration and communication skills (page 41), essential skills for effective interaction in teams, communities and organisations both in physical and in virtual interactions (page 54), problem-solving skills (page 57), and self-regulatory skills (page 69). These are clear transversal skills which are not tackled across many of the other EU publications, and which appear next to the more common digital and basic skills.

A reason for this broad overview of competences can be owed to the fact that the framework is looking more broadly at competences needed for personal fulfilment and development, employability, social inclusion, civic participation and democracy, rather than at technical skills. References to validation and guidance are limited to one relevant mention for each.

Similar to all other competence frameworks discussed in this Report, it makes reference to all the other frameworks, showing an interconnectedness between them and a concerted approach to their implementation and usage (most likely since it is issued from the same institution, the JRC), but it has minimal references to any other EU policy initiatives. This is the

case mostly because the competence frameworks take a more generalist perspective, not being tied with any specific policy and being suitable for broader implementation.

GreenComp

In 2022, the Joint Research Centre published the European sustainability competence framework, also known as GreenComp. The same logic governing DigComp, EntreComp or LifeComp is applied to GreenComp, and the same approach of cross-referencing the other competence frameworks is found here. This common approach to their format might also be owed to the fact that the JRC published them all within a short span of time in which the core research teams were shared over the different publications. GreenComp has, therefore, the same approach to references to skills and competences while also not mentioning specific EU policy initiatives.

Some of the concepts discussed across it might fall under the category of transversal skills, such as sustainability skills (page 6), or critical thinking as a high-level cognitive process, which includes several skills needed for evaluating and understanding information regarding sustainability problems (page 21). That being said, it does not specifically refer to transversal skills, or similar concepts. Similarly, to the other competence frameworks, it makes no reference to validation or guidance, besides the guidance required for educators to incorporate the framework in their work. Though a technical document for development of competences, it is unclear why it is viewed so distinctly from the validation and recognition of competences.

A point that is worthwhile mentioning with regards to GreenComp, is that it is one of the few competence frameworks already translated into all EU languages even if it is one of the more recent frameworks. This is essential to ensure its uptake at national level, as it has been a common drawback for implementation to lack translation for such documents. Its presence in all EU languages can ensure better coherence and alignment between national policies and the EU ones, while it offers the opportunity to clarify certain concepts over which a common term might not exist.

ESCO Green skills taxonomy

The European Commission (DG EMPL) has published a New taxonomy of skills for the green transition in European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO). It includes 381 skills, 185 knowledge concepts and 5 transversal skills considered most relevant for a greener labour market. The Technical Report *Green Skills and Knowledge Concepts: Labelling the ESCO classification* was published in early 2022. While published the same year as the GreenComp, this taxonomy does refer to green competences as transversal skills.

Within the transversal skills hierarchy, the five green transversal skills belong to the same transversal skill group: “T6 – Life skills and competences”. Examples include evaluate environmental impact of personal behaviour, adopt ways to foster biodiversity and animal welfare, adopt ways to reduce negative impact of consumption.

ResearchComp

The competence framework for researchers was listed as an upcoming policy initiative in the EU Skills agenda. The development of the Competence Framework for Researchers (2022) is being led by the European Commission's Directorate General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), with support by the European Commission's Joint Research Centre (JRC). Its goal is to foster intersectoral mobility. **ResearchComp is the first European Competence Framework that is directly linked to the ESCO classification, which is seen as a very positive factor for coherence.** ResearchComp is made up of 38 interrelated and interconnected competences that are clustered in 7 competence areas: cognitive abilities, self-management, working with others, doing research, managing research, managing research tools, and making an impact.

How does it relate to transversal skills and competences? Interestingly, it refers to "transferable skills" (page 4, 5) or 'hard and soft skills' (page 14) despite being referenced to ESCO: *'The competences used in the Framework derive from the list of transversal skills linked to researchers' occupations that were identified in the context of the update of the ESCO classification'*. While it does not explain the choice of terms, we make the assumption that the main reason it chose "transferable skills" is because it relies on the results of the referenced MORE studies²⁷ which was using this terminology. The study showed the importance of 'transferable skills' for researchers next to 'core research activities' (page 17-19): *"While the MORE studies revealed that nearly 9 out of 10 EU researchers consider transferable skills to be important for recruitment and career progression, only a minority of PhD candidates in the EU receive training in transferable skills during their PhD and the MORE studies do not show a positive evolution. Moreover, PhD candidates who receive training during their doctorate most frequently follow training modules closely related to core research activities."*

ResearchComp refers to validation of competences e.g.: *"Moreover, it is advisable to assess if and how to document acquired competences as ResearchComp could be used as a self-evaluation tool for researchers or to show future employers the level that they have reached for specific competences in the Framework. This could be inspired by ongoing initiatives on the validation of prior learning (VPL)."*

Financial competence framework (EC and OECD)

In the 2020 Capital Markets Union Action Plan, the European Commission, DG FISMA (European Commission Directorate-General for Financial Stability, Financial Services and Capital Markets Union), committed to conducting a feasibility assessment on the development of an EU financial competence framework. The European Commission and the OECD International Network on Financial Education (OECD-INFE) have released the joint EU/OECD-INFE financial competence framework for adults in 2022. It followed a Recommendation of the OECD Council on Financial Literacy (29 October 2020). The framework promotes a shared understanding of the financial competences adults need to make sound decisions on personal finance.

²⁷ <https://www.more-4.eu/>

The framework builds on the existing OECD/INFE financial literacy core competences frameworks and updates them with digital and sustainable finance competences and competences relevant for resilience. Financial literacy refers to a combination of financial awareness, knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours necessary to make sound financial decisions and ultimately achieve individual financial well-being. This definition is in line with the EU Council Recommendation's definition of "competence".

Interestingly, for each competence, three dimensions are considered (which echoes the work of OECD presented in the Report introduction):

- (i) awareness/knowledge/understanding;
- (ii) skills/behaviour; and
- (iii) confidence/motivation/attitudes.

The first dimension "awareness/knowledge/understanding" covers competences that are related to knowledge or informational aspects (to be aware of certain information or to be knowledgeable about a topic). The second dimension "skills/behaviour" describes competences related to actions and skills that have the objective of improving individual financial well-being. The third category "confidence/motivation/attitudes" seeks to capture the internal decision-making that supports or hinders financial behaviour to achieve or maintain financial well-being. Therefore, it reads as a competence framework which is aligned in terms of terminologies for the definition of competences to the Council Recommendation on Key competences for lifelong learning and JRC's competence frameworks.

Focusing on individuals' needs for financial competences could have positive spill-over for individuals' professional and social life which is one element that makes skills and competences transversal, however, the scope of the competences is usually quite specific e.g., prices, purchases and payments and can therefore be considered as relatively specific. Organised by content area, it does have some transversality through clusters of competences e.g., "Planning and managing finances" as it echoes transversal skills and competences from the ESCO mapping (cluster "Thinking skills and competences" and "Life TSCs" cluster about "Applying entrepreneurial skills and competences").

Financial competences are not here defined as transversal competences however, there is a part on "Cross-cutting dimensions of the framework" which looks at transversal aspects i.e. Digital financial competences, Sustainable finance competences, Financial resilience, and Essential competences (which echoes basic skills which are by definition applicable in the largest share of contexts).

Furthermore, it does state that "in order to make the framework easier to navigate and use for policy makers and practitioners, it specifies competences that are particularly relevant to: (i) daily life and/or to current or future financial well-being; and to (ii) a majority of the adult population." This categorisation of competences illustrates how users can select certain competences to distinguish "essential" competences from more "advanced" or "expert" competences.

European Year of Skills 2023

Before discussing the European Year of Skills 2023 initiative, it is important to establish what a European Year is and what is the purpose of this European Commission Proposal. The process of dedicating a European Year to a topic has been occurring since 1983, without it being the case for every single year. Usually, the European Commission decides on the topic for the Year. More recently, it has been announced in the State of the European Union speech that the President of the European Commission holds in September of each year. The European Years are an awareness campaign on a specific issue to encourage debate and dialogue in and between EU countries, taking stock of remaining challenges and ways forward. It can also release EU funding to be dedicated for the chosen topic.

In 2022, the European Commission decided for 2023 to become the European Year of Skills. This topic is the most relevant recent one for this paper, and, therefore, no other European Year initiative was analysed in this Report. Once proposed by the European Commission, the European Parliament and the Council of the EU must vote for its approval. The process was delayed due to negotiations between the three institutions; therefore, the Year will commence later in May 2023²⁸. Due to the moment at which sources have been analysed for this report, the focus here is only on the European Commission's Proposal for a European Year of Skills, published in October 2022.

As expected, it has 157 references to skills, but it has significantly lower references to competences, which appear only on 4 occasions in the document (in the sense understood by this research). The skills are fully linked to the needs of the labour market, to closing skills mismatches on the labour market and to skills for newly emerging jobs. The sole reference to transversal skills (page 6) is made in relation to the European Research Area and the preparation of highly-skilled workers. The vision over the necessity of transversal competences or skills and the place where they can be found is significantly narrow compared to the previously analysed documents.

There is no reference made to validation, while the only competence framework linked to this Proposal is the jointly developed EU/OECD financial competence framework for adults. It must be mentioned that it makes broad connections with a wide variety of EU strategies, policy documents and funding programmes, touching upon the most important ones for education and training, including the European Education Area and the European Skills Agenda, but also expanding to any kind of sector which refers to needs for skills development. To this end, the European Year of Skills foresees the horizontal cooperation of 22 Directorate-Generals, out of the total 33 that the European Commission has.

²⁸ Previous European Years have been discussed and announced several years in advance and therefore allowing for suitable preparation time and more timely starts.

EU Validation and guidance policies

We have already seen that one follow-up of the 2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL was the Upskilling pathways initiatives (before 2020) and the EU skills agenda (2020). The progress made on the implementation of the Recommendation on VNFIL has been evaluated in 2020, that is two years after the end of the period in which all Member States were encouraged to have a validation system in place (2018). Post 2020, there is still no dedicated policy on guidance, but it is largely included in the policies studied for this research. We will see that the main follow-up of validation policies lies in the microcredential initiative.

2012 Recommendation on VNFIL follow-up policies

The Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning

There are two documents to consider in that regard, the External study and the European Commission Evaluation (2020b). The External study for the evaluation of its implementation was published in February 2020 and was the main basis for the EC Evaluation which followed a few months later. In July 2020, the European Commission published a Commission Staff Working document on the Evaluation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (VNFIL). This Staff Working Document (SWD) accompanied the Communication on the Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience (COM(2020) 274 final - SWD(2020) 122 final).

The Evaluation of the EU 2012 Recommendation on VNFIL focused on whether the objectives of the Recommendation have been achieved in terms of enabling individuals: (i) to identify and document their skills and competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning; and (ii) to obtain either full or part qualifications compliant with recognised national and European standards for the benefit of their professional and social development. The 2012 Council Recommendation asked Member States to take action no later than 2018, therefore the evaluation covers the period from the adoption of the Recommendation (end of 2012) to 2018 included.

Part of this evaluation is based on a wide-open public consultation to collect information and opinions from the general public and stakeholders as well as on an external study supporting the Evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, prepared by ICF S.A and 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH (2020). The external study has used as its main sources the 2010, 2014 and 2018 updates of the European Inventory of validation of non-formal and informal learning. The results of this evaluation are said to be used to inform future EU decisions in the area of validation.

There are also indications that more validation opportunities for short learning experiences should be further developed, which pre-empts the launch of microcredentials initiatives.

Differentiated coverage of transversal skills and competences

The supporting Study as well as the Summary of the responses received through the Open Public Consultation report highlight the importance of and put forward some recommendations around the validation of transversal skills.

- *“It has been argued that synergies between validation and EU credit systems could be potentially improved through the definition of qualification standards attached to EU key competences for lifelong learning, **especially transversal competences** (e.g., acquired through volunteer work).”* (Page 66 of the External study)
- *“For example, while discussing accessibility to VNFIL which overall improved since 2012, it is felt that **there is still room for progress regarding the validation of transversal skills** acquired in the volunteering and youth sectors which is also highly dependent on the visibility of such initiatives”.*²⁹

However, in the Study consultation, several stakeholders also reported that validation arrangements in their respective country cater for people missing basic skills as well as transversal skills, in accordance with the shared principles of the 2012 Council Recommendation and the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. Reference is for instance made to the project RECTEC in French Speaking Belgium for the recognition of transversal skills as an indicator of employability – such skills are included in the vocational profiles accompanying the qualification standards against which candidates are assessed³⁰. This shows that despite the 2012 Recommendation having no recommendations on that aspect, bottom-up initiatives emerged independently and made it through in policy documents such as its evaluation.

While the external study makes a number of references to transversal skills (7 mentions), the EC SWD accompanying the Evaluation of the EU 2012 Recommendation has no direct references to transversal skills, which is rather at odd with the EU Skills Agenda which was published at the same time, and which explicitly linked validation with transversal skills. It is also worth noting that there is a bigger imbalance between skills and competences mentioned in the SWD compared to the Study with skills being mentioned 23 times more in the SWD than competences, while they are only mentioned twice as much as competences in the Study.

Coherence

In terms of coherence, as it is an evaluation of an EU policy, the EC Better Regulation Guidelines apply, therefore the five criteria are evaluated, and it includes coherence. There are reflections on coherence in both documents (the Study and the EC evaluation). The EC SWD include a part on coherence in accordance with the EC *Better Regulation Guidelines*³¹. It looked into the internal and external coherence of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL

²⁹ “There needs to be further work on finding ways of giving visibility to skills acquired outside the formal education system, especially transversal skills” (page 112 Study supporting the Evaluation, 2020).

³⁰ TRANSVAL-EU explicitly builds its work on RECTEC’s developments.

³¹ “To what extent is the Recommendation coherent with other European policy initiatives and developments in related instruments?”

(horizontal coherence) as well as vertical coherence (with national policies). It talks about three types of coherence, thematic, conceptual and organisational. A few pages are dedicated for coherence in the external study (page 93).

According to the Study (page 36-37):

- *“The Recommendation is coherent with European policies and tools in related fields. Some of its provisions, while conceptually coherent, may be less coherent with specific tools implemented nationally. The Recommendation is coherent with national validation policies, although some of its provisions are not fully implemented.”*
- *“Most national experts interviewed recognise the **conceptual and thematic coherence** of the Recommendation with other EU policy areas and instruments. The **principle of learning outcomes** is the red thread that ensures consistency across relevant EU policies and tools.”*

On coherence with EU policies there are two of them at EU level that are mostly looked into, those are the EQF Council recommendation and Upskilling Pathways policy (thematically and conceptually). For EQF, the Study evaluators even mention “organisational coherence” thanks to the work of the EQF AG. The evaluators find less coherence with specific policy tools: e.g., ECTS and the European Credit System for Vocational Education Training (ECVET).

The Evaluation states that there is coherence (“general consistency”) with national policies³² however, this is not fully the case in terms of practical implementation of its principles e.g., access to validation not comprehensive in all countries³³.

The second lesson in “6.2 Lessons learned” of the SWD is about the “organisational coherence” identified as a challenge still in the Study: *“Stakeholders’ cooperation is not enough. There is a need for strategic coordination between validation providers, with other stakeholders as well as in the policy realm (with other skills policies). A closer coordination and cooperation could improve both “effectiveness – through better visibility, wider reach out, operational synergies – and efficiency, by distributing burdens, sharing facilities and peer learning”.*

Guidance

There isn’t a dedicated policy for guidance at EU level, however, it is part of a few policies, addressed in publications, and there are cooperation mechanisms (networks) that include policy recommendations on that matter. Guidance was an important dimension addressed in the Upskilling pathways policies but almost absent in the 2012 Council Recommendation on VNFIL. Today, it seems that there is a general consensus that validation and guidance go hand in hand (Cedefop, Guidelines on VNFIL, 2023) however it is noted in a few policy publications that the connection is not yet sufficient.

³² *“This is particularly apparent in countries that adapted their relevant legal framework or strategies.”*

³³ *“Stakeholders who noted some lack of coherence referred indeed to the gap between the limited access made available by national action and the general access promoted by the Recommendation.”*

This point is also addressed in the EC Evaluation of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL (Lesson 3): *“Providing more guidance is not enough. Closer cooperation and effective coordination between providers of guidance and validation is needed. The guidance messages should be tailored to the audience, e.g., for vulnerable workers talking about upskilling. This would promote take-up in general, and in particular improve effective tailoring of validation initiatives addressing disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, making them more effective and efficient, in coordination with the implementation of the Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways.”*

The Commission Study ‘Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities’ (2020a) encourages Member States to provide career development support for individuals of all ages, at all career stages. TSCs are not mentioned. Soft skills are mentioned as part of the competences needed by guidance practitioners (page 50). Good practices of assessment tools (NL, IE) measuring soft skills are mentioned. Transferable skills are mentioned in the context of a reference to a study from Bimrose & Brown, 2010: *“Those workers who possess transferable skills have significant advantages in changing careers over those who define themselves almost exclusively by their occupational and/or organisational attachments”* with a focus on “career adaptability”. But despite this limited coverage of TSCs as such, the document includes several references of categories of TSCs e.g., career adaptability competences (learning in networks, learning on-the-job and learning through occupational changes and challenges).

The Study also looks into coherence themes with a focus on how guidance policies are integrated into lifelong learning policies (as it is considered to be in need of close linkage). The section “3.5. Lifelong guidance and lifelong learning strategies and policies” has a table which differentiates countries based on the linkages between lifelong guidance and lifelong learning policies.

Key feature	Dimensions			
Lifelong guidance and lifelong learning practices, strategies and policies	Fragile, Temporary, minimal	Partial	Separate	Overarching, coherent
	Links in early stages of development or else exert minimal influence on practice.	Linked strategy may be in place, but practice constrained by weaknesses in either or both components.	Lifelong guidance and lifelong learning strategies operate within own domains with little interaction.	Lifelong guidance and lifelong learning strategies are integrated and refer to each other.
Example			Malta	Austria, Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Norway, Scotland

Table 4: EC Study ‘Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities’ (2020).

The authors specify that *“the relationship can be defined as overarching and coherent when there is a policy framework and/or practice which links lifelong learning and lifelong guidance. This occurs where lifelong learning and lifelong guidance policies/strategies are integrated and refer to each other, as well as borne out in practice.”*

Given country examples (Finland, Estonia, Austria, Ireland and Scotland), are all seen to have coherent lifelong guidance and lifelong learning strategies. It also gives the example of the Norwegian skills strategy as a positive example in terms of coherence thanks to the overarching dimension of the strategy.

Furthermore, it adds *“The shifts outlined above are already underway to some extent, but further action is required. Such action means that lifelong guidance programmes and policies need to be crosscutting as well as being implemented in each of the relevant fields, including general education (schools); vocational education and training; higher education and training; adult learning; work (for working people, older workers and unemployed); social inclusion (e.g. early school leaving and dropout, long-term unemployed or disabled); and transnational mobility in education and employment.”* A point which can support reflection for EU policy design.

In this Study, besides lifelong learning strategies, it mentions validation and national skills strategies. The Study also addresses the issues of “3.6. Coordination and cooperation” in which it outlines four dimensions, or types of coordination and cooperation: insular; bilateral; multilateral; and open and how they contribute to coherence.

Council Recommendation on Microcredentials

On 16 June 2022, the Council of the European Union adopted a Recommendation on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability. The Recommendation seeks to support the development, implementation and recognition of micro-credentials (MCs) across institutions, businesses, sectors and borders. For this policy review, the Council Recommendation on microcredentials is considered to be the main initiative following up with the council Recommendation on VNFIL.

The Council Recommendation on Microcredentials aims to *“enable individuals to acquire, update and improve the knowledge, skills and competences they need to thrive in an evolving labour market and society, to benefit fully from a socially fair recovery and just transitions to the green and digital economy and to be better equipped to deal with current and future challenges”*.

Both proposals were part of the twelve flagship actions announced in the European Skills Agenda (July 2020). The Communication underlined that Action 10 builds on the results of the evaluation of the 2012 Council Recommendation on Validation of non-formal and informal

learning. Micro-credentials are also featured in the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan (March 2021) and the Commission Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025 (September 2020). The Recommendation covers all sectors of education (formal, non-formal and informal) and appears as a good practice on that regard of a cross-sector policy from our policy review.

References to TSCs and related terms

The 2022 Council Recommendation includes 32 mentions of skills and 9 of competences, 12 references to validation and 9 to guidance. There is one mention of “transversal skills”³⁴ and apparently no other references to synonym terms. However, there is a mention of a broad category of TSCs (“personal, social, cultural and professional”). It does not refer explicitly to the recommendation set in the EU Skills Agenda to explore microcredentials on TSCs for validation practitioners³⁵, which tends to demonstrate a lack of horizontal coherence.

Coherence

There are no mentions of any terms of coherence except “coherent policy packages” (referring here to the Effective Active Support to Employment following the COVID-19 crisis - EASE Council Recommendation). Unsurprisingly, there is a reference to the EU Skills agenda, the VNFIL Council Recommendation (twice) and the European Education Area (5 times) but no reference to the Council Recommendation on Key competences. Moreover, the Recommendation makes no reference to National Skills Strategies. In terms of sector-specific policy references, it refers to youth policy (youth guarantee) but not to the 2019 strategy. There is one reference to the adult learning agenda, one to VET, no reference to school policy, and specific policy references as regards to higher education (Bologna EU Higher education area, EU universities). No competence frameworks are being referred to in the Recommendation despite their relevance for quality training courses and e.g., for defining learning outcomes.

Individual learning accounts

On 31 May 2022, the Council Recommendation on Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) was adopted. With some links to validation and guidance, Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) are “*virtual wallets, established by national authorities, for every person of working age. This includes the employed, self-employed, those in atypical forms of work, and the unemployed and people outside the labour force*” (European Commission Website).

The Council Recommendation refers 22 times to skills and once to competence, validation is referred to 18 times and 17 times for guidance, which makes it a very relevant topic in that

³⁴ “These smaller units can help learners to develop or update their cultural, professional, and transversal skills and competences at various stages in their lives.” (page 7)

³⁵ Action 7: “develop resources to support validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services. This will include exploration of EU-wide online courses and related micro-credentials for validation practitioners (...).”

policy compared to the other policies studied in our review. Transversal skills are not referred to, nor synonym terms or TSC categories and clusters. Coherence or related terms are not mentioned. The term “Competence framework” is mentioned but without specific references to JRC work publications.

The EU skills agenda is referred to twice, same for the Council Recommendation on VNFIL, but there are no references to the Council Recommendation on Key competences and the European Education Area. There is no mention of national skills strategies and to the EU youth policies. There is a small reference to VET but ambiguous and no reference to higher education policies.

MONITORING AND REPORTING

While our policy review is having a look at the origins of the policy coherence building process i.e., the design of the policy by policy-makers, it is believed that close follow-up and evaluation is necessary to ensure the implementation of policy coherence. The EU institutions involved in education and training (or lifelong learning) policies have some tools and initiatives that look into the monitoring and evaluation of their policies. Those tools include recurring monitoring (Education and Training Monitor, European Semester), mid-term reviews (e.g., European Education Area) or evaluations (Council Recommendations on VNFIL and Upskilling pathways). However, no evaluation or monitoring is foreseen for the EU skills agenda flagship actions despite the publication of fact sheets presenting updates on its implementation. The EU year of skills 2023 is likely to be only evaluated from the point of view of its communication impact (outreach and engagement of stakeholders in its implementation).

Education and Training monitor

The Education and Training Monitor started to be published annually since 2015 by the European Commission and represents a comparative analysis of how education and training has evolved across Europe. It contains one report for each Member State as well as an overarching EU report, and it is grounded by a set of key indicators and targets established initially through the former ET2020 framework and then by the Strategic Framework for the implementation of the European Education Area. As the most comprehensive analysis of all sectors of education, even if mainly focused on formal education, it is the most important resource for monitoring on the sector that the European Commission has.

For feasibility reasons, but also for better understanding coherence at EU level, only the comparative reports have been studied for this Report, leaving the national reports outside of this research. Moreover, the focus was given to the Monitors of 2020, 2021 and 2022, in line with the initial methodology of splitting EU initiatives between pre-2020 and post-2020, considering how the new cycle of strategies in education and training commenced in 2020 with a renewed focus on policy coherence.

References to skills are numerous over the three iterations, exceeding 100 in the last two editions. However, the majority of these are limited to discussions on digital skills and technical ones, especially in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. Direct references to transversal skills are made only in the 2020 edition, but socio-emotional competences, life skills, and transferable skills are mentioned across each of the publications. There is a thread across all documents in referring to non-cognitive social skills and interpersonal skills, with some punctual references to entrepreneurial skills, decision-making skills, ethical competences, which are more transversal in nature.

In terms of competence frameworks referencing, the 2020 edition mentions DigComp, while the 2022 one mentions EntreComp, DigComp and GreenComp, and this is visible in the

alignment of terms for competences that are used. In 2021, where no competence framework was referenced, there is also a divergence between terms and less references to specific competences present in the competence frameworks. There are minimal references to the Skills Agenda in all Monitors, but more references to the European Education Area (a peak on European Education Area is registered in the 2021 edition where it is mentioned 24 times). The Monitors refer to other EU initiatives, but what can be observed from one edition to another is that there is inconsistency into what it chooses to mention and insist upon, even if the structure remains more or less the same. It is the policy coherence that is affected by it, rather than the coherence of data collected on the different indicators for education and training.

European Semester

The European Semester is the framework for cooperation that the EU established for the Member States' economic and social policies. It was initiated in 2010, as a response to the economic crisis of 2008-2009, and initially it was concentrated on economic policy, and on promoting fiscal prudence. As time passed, the Semester increased its focus on social policies. The process works in yearly cycles which are split into three stages: one in which the European Commission establishes the priorities for a year, one in which Country Reports are drafted to see the situation in each Member State and one in which the European Commission elaborates Country Specific Recommendations, according to its priorities and according to the findings in each Member State. The importance of this process is that it guides Member States towards the types of reforms they should do and the funding that they should allocate for it, including in the field of skills and competences development. To this end, the direction which the Semester takes, can say something on the policy coherence of recommendations for national investment with EU policies on the topic.

The data in each report is collected through study missions performed by the European Commission in the different Member States, through self-reported data by the Member State and through any other source which the European Commission considers when performing its desk research. Though structurally each Country Report looks the same, there is not always consistency in terms of the data sources used between the countries, and it frequently depends on which stakeholders are engaged in each country to provide the European Commission with data and take part in the visits that the European Commission performs in each country. However, the fact that the Social Scoreboard is used across all Member States leads to comparable data on indicators such as individuals with basic or above digital skills, or adult participation in learning, or tertiary education attainment which can contribute to the understanding of access to developing transversal skills. The monitoring leads to Country Specific Recommendations which can impact skills acquisition in the Member States, though the vast majority of such recommendations do not specifically look at transversal competences.

The Country Reports have not been analysed for this Report due to reasons of feasibility, while the more interesting documents have been the ones setting up the annual priorities, namely the Annual Sustainable Growth Survey (ASGS). The four iterations covering the period 2020-

2023 have been analysed here, and they have not touched upon the term competence as understood here at all, while there has been a significant jump in references to skills, as there were 7-8 such references over the period 2020-2021, jumping to 24 in 2022, and to 28 in 2023. Though encouraging to see whole-of-government references in two of the four ASGSs analysed, there is an inconsistency in the lack of references to skills and in the talk of skills as required for the labour market. Though the approach is consistent with the one seen in the European Commission Proposal for a European Year of Skills, it is far narrower compared to the rest of the EU initiatives on skills analysed above. This is somewhat counter-intuitive as coherence over investment in skills development is crucial to meet the objectives presented in the other EU policies. There is no reference on transversal skills or on many of the different types of skills and competences from the other EU initiatives mentioned above. The ones referred to are basic, digital and innovation skills, with the emphasis on digital skills falling on technical ones, as assumed to be the only ones needed for the labour market.

National Recovery and Resilience Plans

In the context of the Recovery and Resilience Facility, funding has been made available to Member States, in the form of both grants and loans, in order to aid them during the COVID-19 pandemic. The funding is to be tied with specific reforms, and to disburse this funding, Member States must elaborate a National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) which is to be approved by the European Commission. The NRRPs contain specific reforms as well as their timeline and budgetary requirements, and every year the European Commission is monitoring their implementation and providing corrective indications. In an analysis of the Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) on the NRRPs proposed by 19 Member States, transversal skills were mentioned only by the Portuguese NRRP, with regards to a reform of the higher education sector, while the Spanish NRRP was the only one that mentioned key competences in the context of a curricular reform for compulsory education. The focus of the plans when it comes to learning has been the digital and green transitions, and this can be seen in the narrower perspectives taken over the required skills. The references to digital skills are by far the majority of references on skills in all the NRRPs studied in the LLLP analysis³⁶.

The main issue with the monitoring of the NRRPs and with their adaptation is that various education stakeholders are not included in the process, even if this is required by the European Commission³⁷. In this context, the data on transversal skills and those acquired in non-formal and informal contexts, and which sometimes reside with various stakeholders are not included in the monitoring. The bulk of monitoring on reforms has been reduced to formal education due to the fact that most reforms look at the formal education sector. Data collection on formal education is easier than on other forms of learning.

³⁶ Lifelong Learning Platform (2022), Infonote, National Recovery and Resilience Plans, <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sbFnMM6i94xgJDRUTBMbTYCicihKZJ08/view>

³⁷ Civil Society Europe (2021), Report on the Participation of civil society organisations in the preparations of the EU national Recovery and Resilience Plans.

Mid-term reviews

The mid-term review of the European Education Area, which was briefly mentioned in the previous sections of this Report, is an informal review process detailing the status of the action points foreseen in the initial Communication on Achieving the European Education Area by 2025. It was launched with a Progress Report presented by DG EAC at the end of 2022, it continued with stakeholder consultations and own evaluations over the year 2023, which will foresee a report to be published at the end of 2023. As mentioned above, without being a legally binding requirement to organise such a review, the process does not follow a clear structure. The stakeholder consultations have been ad-hoc conferences or meetings which have been branded as part of the mid-term review consultative process, while the focus has been skewed mainly towards formal education, considering that the action points of the European Education Area have been leaning mostly towards formal education. Therefore, it is difficult to see how the actions on skills are monitored, especially as the European Skills Agenda does not foresee a specific mid-term review process. It is true that both DG EAC and DG EMPL insist that each initiative is monitored, however, some of the action points do not foresee specific targets or indicators which the European Commission monitors via Scoreboards or annual monitoring, which makes it hard to understand how exactly their implementation is being monitored.

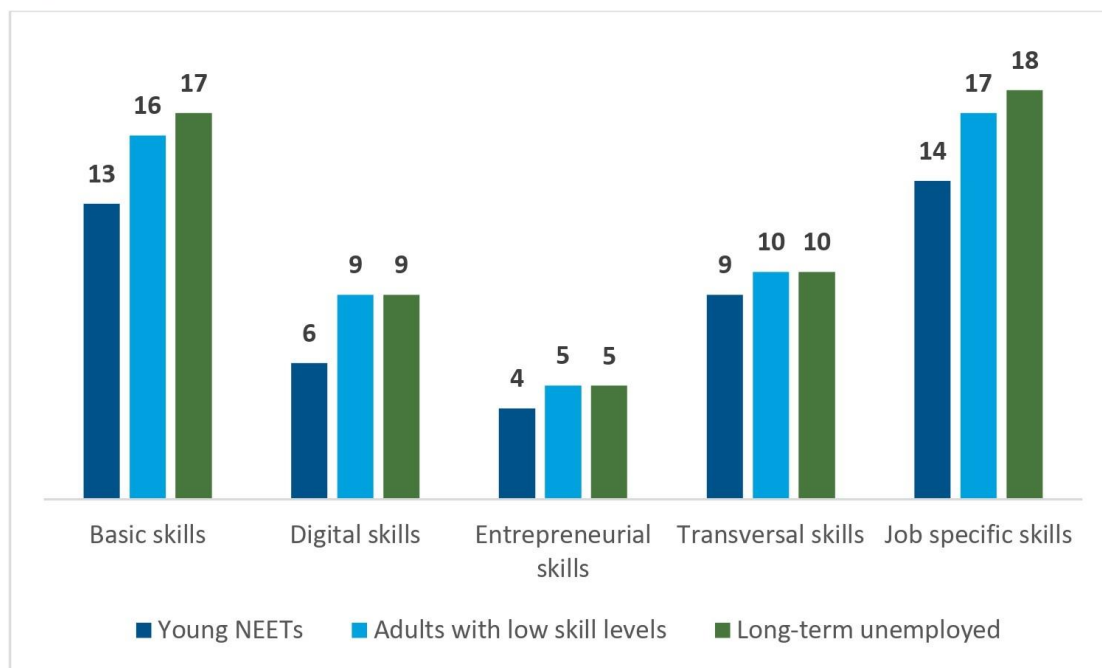
Reports and recurring publications

There are two examples of relevant reports in the field of validation: the EQF AG one-off reports and the Cedefop VNFIL Inventory. The EQF AG one-off reports were discussed previously. In some cases, they are updated. However, in most cases, countries only publish one version of the reports. The one-off reports present the validation systems (and its policies) at national level and can make reference to EU policies. They are a tool for vertical coherence between EU and national policies but also support peer and mutual learning across countries, and hence horizontal coherence. EQF meetings are also used as part of “organisational coherence”, fostering knowledge and hence coherence on national policies. A Note on relevant developments is shared at times with stakeholders. This Note provides an overview on relevant developments in European cooperation in education, training and employment as well as within the EQF Advisory Group. It is structured in four sections: Section I Recent policy developments, Section II State of play of EU initiatives, Section III EQF and validation developments, Section IV Events and studies.

The Inventory includes an EU comparative report and national reports and presents the state-of-play of VNFIL policies and practices in European countries. The last edition was published by Cedefop in 2018. And the next edition is foreseen for 2024 (by ICF). The Inventory is relevant for TSCs as for example it can include policies and good practices that cover it. Very often, this is made possible thanks to the involvement of a larger pool of stakeholders.

In the 2018 edition of the Inventory, the authors looked into the types of skills covered by the validation initiatives:

Figure 3.7 Types of skills covered by the validation initiatives



Source: 2018 European Inventory.

It concluded (page 35) that “Schemes most frequently include the validation of job-specific skills and/or basic skills (13-18 countries addressing these skills for the different target groups in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation). Digital, entrepreneurial and transversal skills receive less attention.” This is the only mention of TSCs in the Synthesis EU report. This is valuable information as it indicates that 10 countries out of the 36 covered by the report cover transversal skills in the validation initiatives (compared to up to 18 for job-specific skills). It is to be expected that transversal skills and competences are mentioned in several country reports. The review of the reports shows a bottom-up development of the field as long as a diversity of stakeholders are consulted in those countries which is neither guaranteed nor equal among countries.

Evaluation studies

Sometimes, the policy foresees an evaluation after a certain date. It was the case with the Council Recommendation on VNFIL which stipulated that EU countries should have VNFIL in place by 2018. An evaluation was foreseen passed this date, in 2020. In this case, the evaluation was led by the EC but with the support of an external study, which is rather common at EU level. There was also an evaluation of the 2017 Council Recommendation on the European Qualification Framework for lifelong learning in 2023 with a survey launched in

July 2022 by the Commission and Cedefop. Based on the results of the study, the Commission will prepare a report to be presented to the Council.

The European Commission Report (COM(2023) 439 final) on the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways was published in July 2023. The evaluation has been underpinned by an external supporting study. The EC Evaluation report is accompanied with a Commission Staff Working Document. The Evaluation showed that despite the fact that stakeholders also report a high level of coherence between the Recommendation and relevant policies and strategies at national and regional level, the implementation has been uneven across the Member States with measures often lacking scale and coordination. Stakeholders consulted at both EU and national level consider the Recommendation to be internally coherent, with consistent objectives, recommendations and expected impacts. The Recommendation is also perceived to be coherent with and complementary to other relevant EU initiatives related to skills and employment³⁸ and with EU funding mechanisms.

The European Commission recommended Member States to *“Strengthen strategic cooperation at national level to create integrated upskilling pathways and open up learning communities, including by developing and reviewing whole-of-government national skills strategies in close partnership with social partners, public employment services and other relevant stakeholders.”* Only the Staff Working Document mentions transversal skills. Following the several mentions by stakeholders in the consultation, it refers to them in its lessons learned: *“Moreover, recent labour market trends are broadening the priority target groups which could benefit from further strengthening their basic and transversal skills”* (page 44).

The EU Youth strategy for 2019-2027 also foresaw an interim evaluation in 2023. At the date of this Report, the public consultation is still ongoing, and the European Commission evaluation is foreseen for the last quarter of 2023. It will be interesting to read the results of the evaluation, particularly on coherence, considering that we have found in our review barely any cross-reference to this policy.

Challenges in monitoring and evaluation

There is limited systematic monitoring and evaluation for skills related policies. For the overarching ones, it is partial (there is for the European Education Area but not the EU skills agenda). Moreover, the European Education Area mid-term review mostly focuses on formal education and does not follow a structured process. The Education and Training monitor could be used as a tool for this but still focuses on a limited type of skills and formal education as well. Monitoring and evaluation often rely on the availability of data and such data is less

³⁸ Notably the Council Recommendations on the validation of non-formal and informal learning (2012), establishing a Youth Guarantee (2013) and A Bridge to Jobs – Reinforcing the Youth Guarantee (2020), the integration of the long-term unemployed into the labour market (2016), key competences for lifelong learning (2018), micro-credentials (2022) and individual learning accounts (2022).

available in the social sector compared to the economic sector. In the field of education, it is more available from the formal education sector which leaves in the shadows whatever happens in non-formal or informal sectors.

Studies often bring much more insights and contribute very much to setting the agenda for future policies, but they are not systematic (i.e. planned for all policies), plus their occurrence is not frequent and does not necessarily help in the implementation phase but rather at the end of a determined period. Furthermore, the consultation process may not involve all responsible authorities, stakeholders, at multi-level of operations hence giving a comprehensive picture of a situation.

Conclusions

The policy review shows that, in general, transversal skills and competences are not a clear priority of EU policies, yet.

We have shown in the Introduction the rationale for having policies that address TSCs. But despite the publications of numerous influential European and international organisations such as the OECD and the World Economic Forum, supported by several academic studies, policy-makers do not seem to pick up strongly on the matter (besides delivering on competence frameworks and the Recommendations on Key competences for lifelong learning). Overall, our study of EU policies shows fragmented and unbalanced focus on TSCs and some temporal incoherence in that respect. Only 13 out of 35, that is one third of the reviewed policies mention the terms “transversal skills and competences”. The use of the term gained popularity; it was included as a flagship action of the EU Skills Agenda (2020) but there has been little clear follow-up for implementation. Furthermore, it comes with blatant contrast compared to the attention paid to the development of digital and green skills in the EU (but also in national) policies. That is the case despite that both digital and green skills and competences refer to clusters of many competences that can have a transversal nature as well (digital skills are considered basic skills needed for all, green skills and sustainability skills are needed in both life and jobs) and that TSCs are as much needed by stakeholders as green and digital skills.

Terminological coherence on transversal skills and competences remains the main challenge in the EU despite progress made in the last 15 years.

The main challenge which has been identified in the policy review is a terminological one. Having a shared language is really important to build coherence across the diversity of EU countries, EU institutions, policy departments and units, sectors of education and employment and social field, and their respective stakeholders (policy-makers, researchers, trainers, educators, practitioners, volunteers, students, etc). There is still confusion around the terms ‘soft skills’, “transferable”, and “transversal skills”, and there is a sort of “dismissal” of JRC’s frameworks definition of “competences” as “knowledge, skills and attitudes” shown by the fact that most policies refer to “knowledge, skills and competences”, therefore excluding the third dimension (and importance) of “attitude”. The fact that there is still a plethora of terminology is detrimental for policy coherence and can generate numbers of inefficiencies and inconsistencies which diminish the impact of EU policies for skills and competences understanding, development (training) and recognition or validation.

The work of the Joint Research Centre on defining competences and developing several competence frameworks is very valuable for policy coherence. But the frameworks are irregularly referenced in policies, hence their potential for strengthening terminological coherence is under-used. ESCO TSC mapping, while relatively recent, is most likely an important step in improving policy coherence in terms of terminologies and vertical coherence due to the fact that it is systematically translated into European countries' languages. But this

will require launching additional awareness raising initiatives to ensure coherence building and that future policies make reference to it.

While defining competences is indeed very useful, the next step is to ensure that this work is being used in validation and guidance provisions, processes and systems.

A step further for EU policies is to play a better role in using all opportunities for translating the frameworks into concrete implementation, for instance, by supporting or encouraging Member States and stakeholders to design policies that aims to foster their use and implementation, to ensure that these competences are being integrated in education curriculum, that professionals are being trained to understand and apply them in their work, that (as recommended by the EU Skills agenda), resources are being developed to support the validation of transversal skills by employers and employment services, or that microcredentials are explored for EU online course on TSCs. Policy impetus as it was shown successfully with the Council Recommendation on Key competences for lifelong learning is an essential element for ensuring coherence and impact for their sustainable use.

Notably, the work of the EQF AG contributes substantially in terms of “organisational coherence” (or vertical coherence) to the follow up of the Council Recommendation on VNFIL and allow for peer learning opportunities between Member States but only a limited number of Member States are yet willing to share their progress. While the Council Recommendations on Validation (2012) and Upskilling pathways (2016), both recently evaluated, still remain relevant in 2023, the follow-up policies are insufficiently coherent, including with the EU Skills Agenda. The Council Recommendation on microcredentials, considered nowadays to be the main follow-up policies on VNFIL, poorly mentioned transversal skills, nor referred to the necessary professionalisation of validation and guidance practitioners as it was recommended in the EU Skills Agenda.

Some policies show a good level of coherence while others much less.

Overall, although limited in that respect, our review found a good level of vertical coherence and coordination between EU and national levels which shows EU institutions’ soft influence. It would be interesting to also consider this aspect with the regional level given that in a majority of EU countries’ regions have competences in education, employment, and related policies e.g., social inclusion (Comorelp project, 2023) but this was beyond the scope of our review. The Council Recommendation Key competences for lifelong learning was found to be the most successful example of vertical and horizontal coherence as well as a driver for policy coherence. The lack of coherence is more blatant in the lifelong and lifewide dimension of EU policies with the youth strategy almost never being cross-referenced and having little continuity with the adult learning agenda. The adult learning agenda is perhaps the policies that show the lowest level of coherence, and this is more an issue in the sense that it concerns the largest amount of the EU population by concerning everyone aged 18 and above including seniors. Considering the EU target of reaching 60% of participation of adults in lifelong learning by 2030, this is regrettable. In some cases, the results of the coherence evaluation are mixed. For instance, the Upskilling pathways Recommendation itself showed good potential for horizontal coherence however its evaluation demonstrates insufficiency with regards to its

vertical coherence. Its implementation has been uneven across the Member States with measures often lacking scale and coordination.

Strategic frameworks, holistic ‘whole-of-government’ strategies are essential to avoid the development of fragmented and disconnected practices across the EU (as shown in TRANSVAL-EU EU State of play report and other project activities).

Our research and experience in the TRANSVAL-EU project demonstrated how likely insufficient coherence and coordination is to drive inefficiencies, for instance in the use of EU funding, with disconnected stakeholders ‘reinventing the wheel’ to develop necessary but redundant tools and methods. Better cooperation, peer learning and more impetus coming from policies at EU level but also with national countries would help to ensure coherence and consistency in Europe. This would help optimise the use of resources, ensuring scaling up and spreading the already numerous innovative, inclusive and successful practices at lower costs.

The EU skills agenda also called for national skills strategies to use whole of government approaches and here again most recent skills-related policies are not fully coherent with this recommendation. There is limited progress since the European Commission made a recommendation of ensuring that “all members have one national skills strategy” as shown by the very limited number of EU countries who took action after 2020 for developing one strategy.

With the EYS2023 having a focus on skills for the labour market, the most holistic and complex definition of competences (as defined for “knowledge, skills and attitudes”) appears to be dismissed.

The same can be said regarding the purpose of skills and competences of transversal nature where the many initiatives have shown that they can be used in both work and life contexts. Consequently, the EYS2023 could be a “missed opportunity” to promote all skills and competences, hence reducing the overall systemic impact it can have on EU Member States as well as on regional and local stakeholders as it overly focuses on responding to employers’ needs with the accompanying idea that those needs are mostly technical skills.

We conclude as well from the policy review that more coordination should be ensured between the different responsible institutions, agencies and other entities, especially ESCO, for skills related initiatives considering the inherent transversal nature of skills.

This means for horizontal coherence (within and between EU institutions) to ensure not just cooperation between employment and education departments but also beyond with all other policy departments. This can be applied to the division found in Member States ministries, governments, and public administrations. Stakeholders’ involvement is also unequal at EU level depending on the institutions and policy competences within the institutions. More cooperation could take place but also between the many Commission's Working groups and programme and funding beneficiaries (e.g. European Social Funds, Erasmus+).

There is no systematic monitoring and evaluation of EU policies, while this is deemed (especially for overarching policies, ones that set the agenda) to be essential for policy coherence.

That results, in cases like for the EU skills agenda, that there is no promise that everything will be achieved, for instance, the strategic framework for TSCs and the setup of a network of pioneer validation organisations. There is no evaluation foreseen for this.

Overall, policy coherence seems a clear priority at EU level, and overarching policies really support its enforcement; however, EU institutions need to better ‘walk the talk’ and set in place concrete coordination mechanisms, inter-institutional bodies, and ensure systematic involvement of stakeholders.

Policy coherence can be very much strengthened this way despite the fact the EU doesn’t have binding competences on education, training and employment policies, it has been clearly demonstrated that Member States show large willingness to implement EU policies and to reference them in their own national and regional systems.

The Report concludes with EU recommendations for EU policy-makers which are outlined below. In the context of the EYS2023, this Report, its conclusions and recommendations are very timely. It is hoped that this policy review and its analysis results can contribute to a renewed interest in the EU Skills agenda implementation, and it can be equally informative for policy-makers to reflect on policy coherence around skills.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR EU POLICY-MAKERS

1. **Promote a shared language for transversal skills and competences:** by using ESCO definition on TSCs and JRC's definition on competences. Mentions of "knowledge, skills and competences" should be dropped and replaced by competences defined as "knowledge, skills and attitudes". The attitude aspect is indeed equally important.
2. **Embrace a more balanced and holistic approach to skills:** All skills are relevant and needed not just for the labour market but also for individuals' participation in the society and their personal development, particularly transversal skills and competences. Currently, EU policies overly focus on green and digital skills as the main ones needed by individuals and the labour market, however, transversal skills are equally needed as shown in this Report introduction. They are particularly beneficial as they support the acquisition of other skills.
3. **Design EU skills, validation and guidance policies using a lifelong and lifewide approach:** This approach for political strategies is shown to considerably enhance policy coherence (as with the example of the Key competence Recommendation) and coordination of policies vertically and horizontally. It shows throughout the lives of individuals the contribution of the diverse learning environments, formal, non-formal and informal for the acquisition of skills and competences. It fosters the implementation of other EU recommendations such as on flexible learning pathways. Overarching policies are highly recommended to ensure coherence.
4. **Reference EU competence frameworks and skills mappings in all skills-related policies.** The work of the JRC and ESCO should not be left only in the hands of voluntary individuals and organisations for their implementation. JRC and ESCO work is crucial for terminological coherence and to avoid increasing fragmentation of practices and resource inefficiencies.
5. **Set policy measures and recommendations for the concrete implementation of competence frameworks:** Frameworks as such do not develop nor validate competences. Finance, organisations and skilled guidance counsellors, assessors and other validation professionals and validators are needed.
6. **Set a concrete strategic framework and financial mechanism for recognising transversal skills and supporting validation practitioners in Europe.** This was a flagship action foreseen by the EU Skills Agenda and should be followed up and achieved. It could be delivered as a tangible outcome of the European Year of Skills. The European Commission could clarify what is expected from such a strategic framework.

7. **Invest more efforts in accompanying Member States in the development of whole-of-government national skills strategies.** This approach is crucial for policy coherence and is also foreseen in the flagship actions of the European Skills Agenda. A follow-up could be conducted with the EC Adult learning working group as it was already discussed there, however it would be regrettable to only follow-up on its implementation from the point of view of adult learners only.
8. **Streamline coherence across all EU policies and support national and regional policy-makers in making it happen,** for instance, by providing guidance on how to concretely implement it through whole-of-institution approaches, coordination mechanisms, frameworks, and structured dialogue. Policy coherence for validation and guidance policies and for the follow-up of the 2012 Recommendation could be strengthened ensuring validation and guidance is systematically referenced in skills-related policies. For monitoring, it might be valuable to explore whether it makes sense to have one-off reports in EQF AG as well as the country reports for the Inventory on VNFIL and merging the two endeavours could be an efficient solution in that regard.
9. **Support Member States more decisively in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their policies.** Regular, transparent and systematic monitoring, evaluation and reporting are also crucial for coherence. PIAAC can be used as an indicator for progress on TSCs and its data can be integrated as an indicator of the different Education and training monitors, including for the European Education Area, the social scoreboard, etc. Support for Member States and EU regions using DG Reform's Technical Support Instrument can be enhanced.
10. **Ensure that cooperation and coordination mechanisms, not only across policy departments but with stakeholders too, is achieved at all levels of operations (EU, national, regional and local).** This is a key success factor for coherence and should be sought in the design, implementation and evaluation of policies.

EU Law Glossary

European legal instruments the term European legal instruments refers to the instruments available to the European institutions to carry out their tasks. As the EU has only a supporting competence over education and training, it mostly issues soft law policy measures, which are non-binding, but nonetheless carry political weight.

Communications usually set out a Commission action plan. They may also include concrete proposals for legislation.

Council Conclusions are policy guidelines adopted at Council meetings. Although not legally binding, the conclusions have political power as a frame of reference.

Council Resolutions are documents that are produced at the end of thematic debates at the Council of the European Union. While they are not legally binding, they have often been transposed into EU law through the work of the European Commission, Council of Ministers, or the European Parliament.

Recommendations and Opinions are non-binding instruments issued by the Commission, the European Parliament, and/or the Council to define its view and suggest a line of action for a specific issue. Most of the Recommendations considered in this Report are Council recommendations.

Staff Working Documents are working documents published by the Commission. A fair proportion of SWD-documents is directly linked to legislative proposals and other documents directly related to the legislative process.

Tables

Table 1: Summary table of the policies and initiatives Reviewed in this Report

Table 2: Examples of other DGs and their role in skills policies (authors own elaboration).

Table 3: Example of cross-committee interventions (own authors).

Table 4: EC Study 'Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU: trends, challenges and opportunities' (2020).

REFERENCES

TRANSVAL-EU Publications

Looney, J. Santibañez, B. (2021). *Validation Of Transversal Skills Across Europe. European State of the Art Report.* TRANSVAL-EU project.
https://www.transvalproject.eu/wpcontent/uploads/2022/03/D2.1_State-of-the-Art-Report_EN_public.pdf

TRANSVAL-EU publications can be downloaded from here:
<https://www.transvalproject.eu/downloads/>

EU Policies

Bianchi, G., Pisiotis, U. and Cabrera Giraldez, M. (2022), GreenComp The European sustainability competence framework, Punie, Y. and Bacigalupo, M. editor(s), EUR 30955 EN, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. ISBN 978-92-76-46485-3, doi:10.2760/13286, JRC128040

Committee of the Regions (2014), Recognition of skills and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning, Opinion Factsheet. (CDR 3921/2014). <https://cor.europa.eu/en/our-work/Pages/OpinionTimeline.aspx?opId=CDR-3921-2014>

Committee of the Regions (2021), European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. Opinion. (2021/C 106/02) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52020IR3878&qid=1647541350743>

Council Conclusions (2019) on the implementation of the Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2019/C 189/04) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG0605\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52019XG0605(01))

Council Recommendation (2012) of 20 December 2012 on the Validation of non-formal and informal learning. (2012/C 398/01) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32012H1222%2801%29>

Council Recommendation (2016) of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016/C 484/01) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=OJ:JOC_2016_484_R_0001

Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key competences for lifelong learning (2018/C 189/01) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32018H0604(01))

Council Recommendation (2020) of 24 November 2020 on vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. (2020/C 417/01). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020IR3878&qid=1647541350743>

[lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29#ntr2-C_2020417EN.01001101-E0002](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A32020H1202%2801%29#ntr2-C_2020417EN.01001101-E0002)

Council Recommendation (2022) of 16 June 2022 on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability (2022/C 243/02) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(02\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(02))

Council Recommendation (2022) of 16 June 2022 on Individual learning accounts (2022/C 243/03) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(03\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(03))

Council Recommendation (2022) on ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality. (9107/22). <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-9107-2022-INIT/en/pdf>

Council Recommendation (2022) of 16 June 2022 on learning for the green transition and sustainable development. (2022/C 243/01) [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627\(01\)](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32022H0627(01))

Council Resolution (2008) of 21 November 2008 on better integrating lifelong guidance into lifelong learning strategies (2008/C 319/02) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/AUTO/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2008.319.01.0004.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2008:319:TOC

Council Resolution (2018), Framework for European cooperation in the youth field: The European Union Youth Strategy 2019-2027, (2018/C 456/01). <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/HTML/?uri=CELEX%3A42018Y1218%2801%29>

Council Resolution (2021), Strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training towards the European Education Area and beyond (2021-2030), Publications Office of the EU; Publications Office of the European Union (2021/C 66/01) https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/AUTO/?uri=uriserv:OJ.C_.2021.497.01.0001.01.ENG&toc=OJ:C:2021:497:TOC

Council Resolution (2021) on a new European agenda for adult learning 2021-2030, Brussels, 29 November 2021, (14485/21). <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/53179/st14485-en21.pdf>

ESCO (2022), *Green Skills and Knowledge Concepts: Labelling the ESCO classification*. 1 January 2022, <https://esco.ec.europa.eu/en/about-esco/publications/publication/green-skills-and-knowledge-concepts-labelling-esco>

European Commission, Joint Research Centre, Bacigalupo, M., Kampylis, P., Punie, Y. et al., (2016) *EntreComp – The entrepreneurship competence framework*, Publications Office, 2016, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2791/160811>

European Commission, Staff Working Document (2018), Accompanying the document Proposal for a Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. SWD/2018/014 final - 2018/08 <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=CELEX%3A52018SC0014>

European Commission (2018), *European Semester: Annual Growth Survey 2019*. (COM(2018) 770 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1547650919951&uri=CELEX%3A52018DC0770>

- European Commission (2019), *European Semester: Annual Growth Survey 2020*. (SWD(2019) 444 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?qid=1578392227719&uri=CELEX%3A52019DC0650>
- European Commission (2021), *European Semester: Annual Growth Survey 2022*. (COM(2021) 740 final) Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://commission.europa.eu/document/3fb1b486-34ab-4491-8fe7-8e64634aa0c1_en
- European Commission (2022), *European Semester: Annual Growth Survey 2023*. (COM(2022) 780 final). Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://commission.europa.eu/publications/2023-european-semester-annual-sustainable-growth-survey_en
- European Commission (2019), Staff Working Document, Council Recommendation on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults Taking stock of implementation measures. (SWD(2019) 89 final). <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7044-2019-INIT/en/pdf>
- European Commission (2020), Communication on achieving the European Education Area by 2025; (SWD(2020) 212 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0625&from=EN>
- European Commission (2020), Communication, Digital Education Action Plan 2021-2027 Resetting education and training for the digital age. (SWD(2020) 209 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:52020DC0624&from=EN>
- European Commission, Communication (2020), Communication on a European Skills Agenda for sustainable competitiveness, social fairness and resilience. {COM(2020) 274 final} - {SWD(2020) 122 final} <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=22832&langId=en>
- European Commission, Communication (2021), The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, (SWD(2021) 46 final) <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=COM%3A2021%3A102%3AFIN&qid=1614928358298#PP1Contents>
- European Commission (2021), Building an economy that works for people: an action plan for the social economy, 9 December 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/social/BlobServlet?docId=24986&langId=en>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Education and training monitor 2021 – Executive summary, Publications Office of the European Union, 2021, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/480191>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture, Education and training monitor 2022 – Comparative report, Publications Office of the European Union, 2022, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2766/117416>
- European Commission, Communication (2022), on a European strategy for universities (SWD(2022) 6 final) <https://education.ec.europa.eu/document/commission-communication-on-a-european-strategy-for-universities>
- European Commission, Communication (2023) A Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age. (COM(2023) 62 final). https://commission.europa.eu/system/files/2023-02/COM_2023_62_2_EN_ACT_A%20Green%20Deal%20Industrial%20Plan%20for%20the%20Net-Zero%20Age.pdf

- European Economic and Social Committee (2020), *Updated skills agenda*. Opinion. 24 February 2020, <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/updated-skills-agenda>
- European Economic and Social Committee (2020), *Towards an EU strategy for enhancing green skills and competences for all*. 24 February 2020. Own-initiative opinion. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/towards-eu-strategy-enhancing-green-skills-and-competences-all-own-initiative-opinion>
- European Economic and Social Committee (2020). *How to promote, based on education and training, from a lifelong learning perspective, the skills needed for Europe to establish a more just, more cohesive, more sustainable, more digital and more resilient society*. 19 November 2020. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/how-promote-based-education-and-training-lifelong-learning-perspective-skills-needed-europe-establish-more-just-more>
- European Economic and Social Committee (2022), *European Year of Skills 2023*. 7 November 2022. <https://www.eesc.europa.eu/en/our-work/opinions-information-reports/opinions/european-year-skills-2023>
- European Parliament, Lehofer, W., Dias, C., & Cunha, I. (2022). *Recovery and Resilience Plans: Stakeholders' involvement*. In-depth Analysis. March 2022. Economic Governance Support Unit (EGOV) Directorate-General for Internal Policies. [https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/689453/IPOL_IDA\(2021\)689453_EN.pdf](https://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/IDAN/2021/689453/IPOL_IDA(2021)689453_EN.pdf)
- European Union/OECD (2022), *Financial competence framework for adults in the European Union* <https://www.oecd.org/finance/financial-competence-framework-for-adults-in-the-european-union.htm>
- Joint Research Centre (European Commission), Vuorikari, R., Kluzer, S., & Punie, Y. (2022). *DigComp 2.2, The Digital Competence framework for citizens: With new examples of knowledge, skills and attitudes*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2760/115376>
- Sala, A., Punie, Y., Garkov, V., & Cabrera, G. M. (2020). *LifeComp: The European Framework for Personal, Social and Learning to Learn Key Competence*. JRC Publications Repository. July 3 2020. <https://doi.org/10.2760/302967>

Bibliography and Web sources

- 3s Unternehmensberatung GmbH, Directorate-General for Employment, S. A. and I., European C., & ICF. (2020). *Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning: Final report*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/55823>
- 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, Luxembourg.

- Billett, S. (2014). *The standing of vocational education: Sources of its societal esteem and implications for its enactment*. Journal of Vocational Education & Training, 66(1), 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13636820.2013.867525>
- Brown, A., Bimrose J., Barnes S-A., Hughes D., (2012). *The role of career adaptabilities for mid-career changers*. Journal of Vocational Behavior. 80. 754-761. 10.1016/j.jvb.2012.01.003.
- Bughin, J., Hazan E., Lund S., Dahlström P., Wiesinger A., Subramaniam A.. (2018). *Automation and the workforce of the future | McKinsey*. May 23, 2018, Discussion Paper, Retrieved 18 July 2023, from <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/future-of-work/skill-shift-automation-and-the-future-of-the-workforce>
- Care E., Luo R., (2016), *Assessment of transversal competencies: Policy and practice in the Asia-Pacific region*. UNESCO Office Bangkok and Regional Bureau for Education in Asia and the Pacific, ISBN: 978-92-9223-563-5 Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000246590>
- Cedefop (n.d.), *Inventory of lifelong guidance systems and practices*. CEDEFOP. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/country-reports/inventory-lifelong-guidance-systems-and-practices>
- Cedefop (2014). *Terminology of European education and training policy :a selection of 130 key terms*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/15877>
- Cedefop, Siebel, J., Dorn, B. (2019). *Coordinating guidance and validation*. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/801290>
- Cedefop (2020). *Empowering adults through upskilling and reskilling pathways: Vol. 1: adult population with potential for upskilling and reskilling*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series, No 112. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/691134>
- Cedefop (2021). *Key competences in initial vocational education and training: digital, multilingual and literacy*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop research paper, No 78. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/67103>
- Cedefop (2022), *Work-based learning and the green transition*. (2022, October 24). CEDEFOP. <https://www.cedefop.europa.eu/en/publications/2232>
- Cedefop (2023). *European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning*. Luxembourg: Publications Office. Cedefop reference series; No 124. <http://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2801/389827>
- Chernyshenko, O. S., Kankaraš, M., & Drasgow, F. (2018). *Social and emotional skills for student success and well-being: Conceptual framework for the OECD study on social and emotional skills*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/db1d8e59-en>
- Comorelp project (2023, unpublished), *European policy recommendation Report*. The Lifelong Learning Platform.
- Council of Europe (2013), *The Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC)*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.coe.int/en/web/reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-culture>

- De La Torre, E. M., Perez-Encinas, A., & Gomez-Mediavilla, G. (2022). *Fostering Sustainability through Mobility Knowledge, Skills, and Attitudes*. Sustainability, 14(3), Article 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/su14031349>
- Deming David J. (2017), The Growing Importance of Social Skills in the Labor Market, *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, Volume 132, Issue 4, November 2017, Pages 1593–1640, <https://doi.org/10.1093/qje/qjx022>
- Devika, Raj, P., Venugopal, A., Thiede, B., Herrmann, C., & Sangwan, K. S. (2020). Development of the Transversal Competencies in Learning Factories. *Procedia Manufacturing*, 45, 349–354. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.promfg.2020.04.031>
- EUR-LEX (website). *Glossary of EU terms*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/summary/glossary.html>
- Eurofound (2023), *Measures to tackle labour shortages: Lessons for future policy*, Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. <https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/report/2023/measures-to-tackle-labour-shortages-lessons-for-future-policy>
- European Commission (2019), Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Molyneux, J., Ravenhall, M., Broek, S. et al., *Adult learning policy and provision in the Member States of the EU – A synthesis of reports by country experts*, Publications Office, 2019, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/82188>
- European Commission (2020a), *Lifelong guidance policy and practice in the EU*, Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion, European Commission. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8284&furtherPubs=yes>
- European Commission (2020b), Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, *Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning – Final report*, Publications Office, 2020, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/55823>
- European Commission (2021), *European Semester Spring Package 2021: Economic coordination*. 2 June 2021. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://commission.europa.eu/publications/european-semester-spring-package-2021-economic-coordination_en
- European Commission (website) (2022), *Commission kick-starts work on the European Year of Skills*. 12 October 2022. Website: Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=10431&navItem-relatedDocuments>
- European Commission, Directorate-General for Research and Innovation (DG RTD), Almerud, M., Ricksten, M., O'Neill, G. (2022). *Knowledge ecosystems in the new ERA: using a competence-based approach for career development in academia and beyond*, (L.Núñez, editor, A. De Coen, edito) Publications Office of the European Union. <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2777/150763>
- European Commission (2022), *Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 19 December 2016 on Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults*, Employment, Social Affairs &

- Inclusion, European Commission. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8516&furtherPubs=yes>
- European Commission (2021, 2023), *Better regulation: Guidelines and toolbox*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://commission.europa.eu/law/law-making-process/planning-and-proposing-law/better-regulation/better-regulation-guidelines-and-toolbox_en
- European Commission (2023), Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Duell, N., Guzi, M., Kahancová, M. et al., *Skills shortages and structural changes in the labour market during COVID 19 and in the context of the digital and green transitions – Thematic review 2023 – Synthesis report*, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/807269>
- European Commission (Website) (2023), *European Skills/Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO)*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1326&langId=en>
- Eurostat (Website), *Adult Education Survey (AES) methodology*. European Commission, Retrieved 20 July 2023, from [https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult Education Survey \(AES\) methodology](https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/index.php?title=Adult_Education_Survey_(AES)_methodology)
- Fadel, C. (2012). *What should students learn in the 21st century?* OECD Education and Skills Today. 18 May 2012. <https://oecdeditoday.com/what-should-students-learn-in-the-21st-century/>
- International Bureau of Education (IBE-UNESCO) (2016). *Glossary of Curriculum Terminology*, UNESCO, 17 May 2016. Retrieved 28 August 2023, from <https://www.ibe.unesco.org/en/glossary-curriculum-terminology>
- Lifelong Learning Platform (2022), *Infonote on National Recovery and Resilience Plans Approved by the European Commission*, Google Document. January 2022. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://drive.google.com/file/d/1sbFnMM6i94xgJDRUTBMbTYC1chiKZJ08/view?usp=embed_facebook
- Mccallum, E., Weicht, R., McMullan, L., & Price, A. (2018). *EntreComp into Action - Get inspired, make it happen: A user guide to the European Entrepreneurship Competence Framework*. 2 March 2018, JRC Publications Repository. <https://doi.org/10.2760/574864>
- Meijers, E.J., & Stead, D. (2004). *Policy integration: what does it mean and how can it be achieved? A multidisciplinary review*. In German Political Science Ass. (Ed.), 2004 Berlin Conference on the Human Dimensions of Global Environmental Change: Greening of Policies - Interlinkages and Policy Integration (pp. 1-15). Freie Universität Berlin.
- Melchor, E. A. (2016), *National Coordinators for the Implementation of the European Agenda for Adult Learning*. 2 December 2016 <https://epale.ec.europa.eu/en/resource-centre/content/national-coordinators-implementation-european-agenda-adult-learning>
- More4 Study (n.d.), *More4: Mobility Patterns and Career Paths of EU Researchers*. Mobility Patterns and Career Paths of EU Researchers. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.more-4.eu/>
- OECD (2017), *Policy Coherence for Sustainable Development 2017: Eradicating Poverty and Promoting Prosperity*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/development/policy-coherence-for-sustainable-development-2017_9789264272576-en

- OECD & European Union. (2018). *Settling In 2018: Indicators of Immigrant Integration*. OECD. <https://doi.org/10.1787/9789264307216-en>
- OECD. (2021). *OECD Skills Outlook 2021: Learning for Life*. Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/oecd-skills-outlook-2021_0ae365b4-en
- OECD (Website) (n.d.). *Skills Strategies* Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/skills/oecd-skills-strategies.htm>
- OECD (Website) (n.d.), *Future of Work*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/future-of-work/>
- OECD (Website) (n.d.), *The Study on Social and Emotional Skills—About the Study—OECD*. (n.d.). Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/education/cei/study-on-social-and-emotional-skills-the-study.htm>
- OECD (Website), *Survey of Adult Skills (PIAAC): PIAAC, the OECD's programme of assessment and analysis of adult skills*. Retrieved 20 July 2023, from <https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/>
- Trilling B., Fadel C. (2009), *21st Century Skills: Learning for Life in Our Times*, September 2009, Jossey-Bass, ISBN: 978-0-470-55391-6
- Tuccio, M., Mullock, K., Navarro-Palau, P., & Perez, E. X. C. (2023). *The OECD Skills Profiling Tool: A new instrument to improve career decisions*. Documents de travail de l'OCDE sur les questions sociales, l'emploi et les migrations, n° 293, Éditions OCDE, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/598ff539-en>.
- UNESCO-UNEVOC (Website) (n.d.), *TVETipedia Glossary*. International Centre for Technical and Vocational Education and Training. Retrieved 24 August 2023, from <https://unevoc.unesco.org/home/TVETipedia+Glossary/show=term/term=Transversal+skills#start>
- Vincent-Lancrin, S., et al. (2019), *Fostering Students' Creativity and Critical Thinking : What it Means in School, Educational Research and Innovation*, Éditions OCDE, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/62212c37-en>; and PISA <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/innovation/creative-thinking/>
- Wagner, Tony (2014). *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Our Kids Don't Have the Skills They Need for College, Careers, and Citizenship -- and What We Can Do About It*. The Global Achievement Gap. (2017). <https://www.hachettebookgroup.com/titles/tony-wagner/the-global-achievement-gap/9780465055968/?lens=basic-books>
- World Economic Forum (2020a). *The Future of Jobs Report 2020*. Retrieved 18 July 2023, from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2020/digest/>
- World Economic Forum (2020b), *These are the top 10 job skills of tomorrow – and how long it takes to learn them*. 21 October 2020. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/10/top-10-work-skills-of-tomorrow-how-long-it-takes-to-learn-them/>
- World Economic Forum (2023a), *The Future of Jobs Report 2023*. World Economic Forum. Retrieved 18 July 2023, from <https://www.weforum.org/reports/the-future-of-jobs-report-2023/>
- World Economic Forum (2023b). *Here's why education systems need to start taking a 'skills-first' approach*. World Economic Forum. 30 March 2023. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2023/03/heres-why-educations-systems-need-to-start-taking-a-skills-first-approach/>

ANNEXES

Annex 1: Non-exhaustive list of transversal skills and competences mentioned in EU policies and initiatives.

Policy information				EU policies & initiatives	TSCs mentions
Institution	Policy type	Date	Sectors		
Council	CR	2012	NFE, IFE	Validation and Recognition of VNFIL	Project management, intercultural skills
Council	CR	2016	AE	Upskilling pathways	Generic skills, key competences, Basic, skills, digital skills, communication, problem-solving, teamwork, emotional intelligence
				Key competences for LLL	Critical thinking, problem solving, team work, communication and negotiation skills, analytical skills, creativity, and intercultural skills and others
Council	CR	2018	ALL	Key competences for LLL	Critical thinking, creativity and problem solving
Council	SWD	2018	ALL	Youth strategy	Transferable skills, life skills
Council	RES	2018	Youth	Youth strategy	Life skills
COM	EC	2018	Youth	European Green Deal	Knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development, skills for the green economy
EC	COM	2019	FE, AE	Upskilling pathways	Basic skills, literacy, numeracy, digital competence, key competences
Council	RES	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	Basic skills, literacy, numeracy skills, problem-solving
EC	SWD	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	
After 2020					
External	Study	2020	NFE, IFE	CR VNFIL evaluation (study)	Personal competence
EC	COM	2020	FE	EU Education Area	Critical thinking, entrepreneurship, creativity
EC	COM	2020 (rev)	FE, NFE	EU Skills Agenda	Entrepreneurial skills, critical thinking, working together, creative problem solving
				LifeComp	21st century skills, life skills, socioemotional skills, soft skills, Career management skills, Critical skills for coping with stressful situations and conflicts, and many more
JRC	CF	2020	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2021	Digital skills
EC	COM	2020	ALL	Digital Education Action Plan	Adaptability, communication and collaboration skills, problemsolving, critical thinking, creativity, entrepreneurship and readiness to learn
				Education and Training Monitor 2020	Basic skills, digital skills, non-cognitive social skills, information and data literacy; communication and collaboration; digital content creation; safety and problem solving, job-related and marketable skills, interpersonal skills, language skills
EC	PUBL	2020	ALL	Vocational education and training (VET) for s	Entrepreneurial, digital and green skills
Council	CR	2020	VET	EU pillar of social rights	Digital and green skills
EC	AP	2021	FE/AE	EU Semester ASGS 2022	Digital skills, STEM skills, basic skills
EC	COM	2021	ALL	EEA Strategic Framework	Critical thinking, media literacy, adaptability, digital skills
Council	RES	2021	ALL*	Education and Training Monitor 2021	Decision-making skills, social skills, non-cognitive skills, interpersonal skills, ethical competences
EC	PUBL	2021	ALL	Microcredentials	Personal, social, cultural and professional
Council	CR	2022	ALL	European Universities Strategy	Critical thinking, problem-solving, creative and entrepreneurial skills
EC	COM	2022	HE, VET	DigComp	Critical thinking, learning to learn, collaboration, and many more
JRC	CF	2022 (rev)	ALL	GreenComp	Systems thinking, critical thinking, problem framing, futures literacy, adaptability, exploratory thinking, political agency
JRC	CF	2022	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2023	Digital skills, innovation skills
EC	COM	2022	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2022	Basic skills, digital skills, work-related skills, entrepreneurial skills
EC	PUBL	2022	ALL	Learning for the green transition and sustain	Problem-solving, collaboration skills, foster critical thinking, media literacy skills and systems thinking
Council	CR	2022	ALL*	Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero A	Green skills, digital skills
EC	COM	2023	AE		

Annex 2: Mentions of policy coherence and related terms in reviewed policies.

Policy information				EU policies & initiatives	Reference to Policy coherence	
Institution	Policy type	Date	Sectors			
Council	CR	2012	NFE, IFE	Validation and Recognition of VNFIL		No Reference
Council	CR	2016	AE	Upskilling pathways	1	Coherent
Council	CR	2018	ALL	Key competences for LLL	1	Whole-school
Council	SWD	2018	ALL	Key competences for LLL	7	Whole-school
Council	RES	2018	Youth	Youth strategy	1	Coherent
COM	EC	2018	Youth	Youth strategy	2	Coherence
EC	COM	2019	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2020	2	Systemic approach, whole-of-government
EC	COM	2019	FE, AE	European Green Deal		No Reference
Council	RES	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	1	Coherent
EC	SWD	2019	AE	Upskilling pathways	6	Coherence
After 2020						
EC	SWD	2020	NFE, IFE	CR VNFIL evaluation (SWD)	19	Coherent/ce
External	Study	2020	NFE, IFE	CR VNFIL evaluation (study)	96	Coherent/ce
EC	COM	2020	FE	EU Education Area	1	Coherent, Whole-of-Government
EC	COM	2020 (rev)	FE, NFE	EU Skills Agenda	2	Whole-of-government
JRC	CF	2020	ALL	LifeComp	2	Whole school approach/community
EC	COM	2020	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2021	1	Coherence
EC	COM	2020	ALL*	Digital Education Action Plan	2	Whole institution, whole community
EC	PUBL	2020	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2020	1	Whole-school
Council	CR	2020	VET	Vocational education and training (VET) for sustainable competitiveness	1	Coherent
EC	AP	2021	FE/AE	EU pillar of social rights	3	Coherent
Council	RES	2021	AE	Adult learning	5	Whole-of-government, policy coherence
EC	COM	2021	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2022		No Reference
Council	RES	2021	ALL*	EEA Strategic Framework	2	Whole-school
EC	PUBL	2021	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2021	1	Whole-school
Council	CR	2022	ALL	Microcredentials	1	Coherent
Council	CR	2022	FE/NFE	Individual Learning Accounts		No Reference
EC	COM	2022	HE, VET	European Universities Strategy	2	Whole-institutional approach
JRC	CF	2022 (rev)	ALL	DigComp		No Reference
JRC	CF	2022	ALL	GreenComp	2	Whole school approach
EC	COM	2022	ALL	EU Semester ASGS 2023	1	Whole-of-government
EC	PUBL	2022	ALL	Education and Training Monitor 2022	6	Whole-school, whole-institution, whole-government (IE example)
Council	CR	2022	ALL*	Learning for the green transition and sustainable development	3	Whole-institution approaches
Council	CR	2022	AE	Ensuring a fair transition towards climate neutrality	6	Coherent/ce, whole-of-society approach
EC	COM	2022 (P)	AE, VET	European Year of Skills		No Reference
EC	COM	2023	AE	Green Deal Industrial Plan for the Net-Zero Age		No Reference