EUROPEAN POLICY COHERENCE REPORT

Summary & Key Findings

JULY 2023

SUMMARY

Introduction

This document is the summary of the European Policy Coherence Report and it includes its key findings (conclusions and policy recommendations). TRANSVAL-EU is an Erasmus+ project funded under the Key Action 3 policy experimentation call, which included a research experimentation (so-called "field trials") which has been evaluated by a team of researchers. The results demonstrated the positive impact of integrating transversal skills in validation and guidance processes for practitioners and candidates (see TRANSVAL-EU Report, The impact of validation and guidance of transversal skills, May 2023).

It was foreseen in the frame of the project that the research results, if conclusive, would be translated into policy recommendations for the European Union and for the 5 EU countries involved in the field trials (Lithuania, Austria, Italy, Belgium and Poland). The members of the consortium investigated the policy context and potential for policy change and reforms at regional (for Belgium, and Italy) or national level (for Lithuania, Austria, Italy, and Poland). This work has updated and completed the information which was gathered in the research done during the first stage of the project (see EU State of play Report and Individual Country sheets).

This is in this context (of translating research results into sustainable policy change) that the aspect of policy coherence has been studied and is the object of the European and national policy coherence Reports. Coherence is one of the key dimensions which is being evaluated in EU policies according to the Better regulation Guidelines of the European Commission (2021). The main manifestations of coherence are:

Horizontal coherence

Coherence across policies and policy departments (employment, education, and other policy fields), across sectors of education, in a life-long and life-wide perspective.

Vertical coherence

Between EU policies and policies at national or regional levels.

Terminological coherence

A transversal issue that can affect horizontal and vertical coherence (e.g., using multiple skills and competences terminologies across policies).

Temporal coherence

Llack of continuity of policies over the years and different programming or political periods.

Coherence is very often enforced thanks to existing coordination mechanisms between institutions and the involvement of stakeholders in policy design, monitoring, and evaluation.

At the national level partners from the respective countries have produced National policy coherence reports for the 5 countries cited above and Nordic countries (with a focus on Iceland and Sweden) by looking also at aspects of coordination between policies, terminological issues, policy challenges, etc.

The Lifelong Learning Platform (LLLP) produced an in-depth policy review of EU policies and European initiatives that led to a European Report on Policy coherence. Using a metanalysis methodology, LLLP conducted the review of over 35 policies and relevant initiatives (e.g., competence framework and other publications) which are relevant for skills, validation and/or guidance at European level.

In the European Report introduction, the following is addressed:

Why are transversal skills policies needed in Europe? As highlighted by international institutions (OECD, World Economic Forum) and the publications on and analysis of the needs expressed by employers, policies focusing on transversal skills and competences are needed in Europe. However, there are pending issues in terms of terminologies (e.g., "skills" versus "competences"), an issue which was deemed to be also visible in EU policies.Nowadays, there is an important focus on skills at the expense of all the work that has been done in defining competences in competence frameworks and which led to a better understanding on their complex, and sometimes, transversal nature.

Why do we need coherence in skills policies in Europe? A second question which is the research question of our policy review is how EU policies address transversal skills and competences? Are there addressed in a coherent manner? We identify the key success factors for enforcing coherence and highlight the important issue of policy monitoring and evaluation for its success.

The core of the Report is divided into three Chapters:

Panorama of responsible authorities for skills-related policies in Europe: listing the responsible authorities at EU, European and international level for the policies first, and secondly, the inter-institutional mechanisms relevant for horizontal and vertical policy coherence.

Policy coherence review: looking at relevant policies before 2020 and after 2020 for skills, validation and guidance and providing an analysis on the coherence, consistency and cross-referencing of overarching policies setting the agenda at the beginning of political cycle as well as sector specific policies (youth, adult education, VET etc).

Monitoring and reporting of EU policies: analysing different examples of EU monitoring tools and publications (Education and training monitor, EU semester, National recovery, and resilience plans), types of monitoring and evaluation (mid-term reviews, reports, recurring publications, and evaluation studies) and their related challenges in relation to policy coherence.

Summary Table

	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 competitivene	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*	EEA 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			

The table records the number of mentions for skills, competences, validation, guidance, transversal skills and competences (TSC) and synonym terms, and policy coherence terms for the most relevant EU skills, validation and guidance policies, which were analysed in our review.

Main Conclusions

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

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

- 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.

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

- Strategic frameworks, holistic and 'whole-of-government' strategies are essential to avoid the development of fragmented and disconnected practices across the EU.

- 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.

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

- 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.

- 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.

Recommendations for EU policy-makers

1. Promote a shared language for transversal skills and competences.

2. Embrace a more balanced and holistic approach to skills.

3. Design EU skills, validation and guidance policies using a life-long and life-wide approach.

4. Reference EU competence frameworks and skills mappings in all skills-related policies.

5. Set policy measures and recommendations for the concrete implementation of competence frameworks.

6. Set a concrete strategic framework and financial mechanism for recognising transversal skills and supporting validation practitioners in Europe.

7. Invest more efforts in accompanying Member States in the development of whole-of-government national skills strategies.

8. Streamline coherence across all EU policies and support national and regional policy-makers in making it happen.

9. Support Member States more decisively in the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of their policies.

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).

Read the full report (EN)