Statement on the revision of the Key Competences Framework

Sirius Network acknowledges the importance of the common framework of crucial competences for life across Member States, presenting a step forward to a holistic approach to education and training. However, the Network stresses the need for further synergies and a better alignment with other existing frameworks and researches, such as from the OECD and Council of Europe.

Also, a key element missing from the framework is a definition of the target group. It should target both learners and educators, but also policy makers and employers as secondary target groups. This should be linked to a full autonomy of educational institutions and a whole school approach where learners' and educators' (professionals' and parents') voice are equally strong in designing competence-based curricula.

Moreover, Intercultural competence is not well included in the 8 key competences and it is important to bring some clarity in the definitions. In the current framework, intercultural competence is included under 'social and civic competences' but no proper definition is provided; 'cultural awareness and expression' only refers to one dimension of intercultural competence, namely the one related to cultural heritage and arts.

The current definition does not adequately reflect the global dimension that any kind of social and civic participation entails in our interconnected society. A reference to the global dimension would be helpful to allow a pertinent harmonization with the Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) of the Council of Europe, and the OECD's PISA assessment[1].

Therefore, in accordance with the European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL), we suggest to:
- Provide a clear definition of intercultural competence by 1) making it a separate competence, 2) or include it under social and civic competences with a proper definition. We would suggest the following definition for intercultural competence: "Intercultural competence is the ability to mobilize and deploy relevant attitudes, skills and knowledge to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations[23]. This competence includes recognition and appreciation of one's own and others' multiplicities and how they come into play in different situations. It should not resume to prescriptive solutions for 'specific cultures' and instead focus on preparing for the unexpected, careful perception and dealing with uncertainty";
- Provide a clear definition of culture, from a non-essentialist view;
- Provide a clear list of attitudes, skills and knowledge for each competence, to provide practical examples to educators;
- Include the concept of "global competence" and reference to the core dimensions of "global citizenship education" in the description of social and civic competences; [4]
- Include 'sustainable development' under civic competences;

[1] OECD, (2016) *Global competency for an inclusive world, 2016*
[2] See also the European Federation for Intercultural Learning Statement on the revision of the Key Competences Framework
[3] *D.K. Deardorff, The SAGE book of intercultural competence; Council of Europe, Competences for democratic culture*
[4] Byram (2008) *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship*

- Civic competences should focus on the empowerment of learners for active participation and constructive critical dialogue and action.[5]
- In the definition of each competence, the links with other competences of the framework should be made evident and clear.
- Furthermore, the competence framework should be accompanied guidelines for 'unpacking' the competences into more specific learning outcomes and suggested assessment standards, which is still a challenge for many Member states[6].

In addition, Sirius Network believes that the following Key Competences should be redefined/adjusted:

- Communication in the mother tongue and in foreign languages:

These key competences raise confusion because in multicultural and multilingual societies the notions 'mother tongue', 'official language of the country of residence', 'language of the environment' and 'language of instruction' are interpreted differently in a societal perspective. More and more children and young people are using different languages for distinct functions. The role and use of mother tongue(s), majority language, English and other languages are to be better researched and the framework needs to be modified accordingly. The focus needs to be shifted from the number of 'foreign' languages learnt to the development of an adequate repertoire of languages, styles, registers and genres of learners. Also, new forms of communication are gaining ground, especially in the digital sphere, that are becoming essential 'other languages' for everyday life, the labour market and lifelong learning.

The framework should focus more on a multilingualism approach in which linguistic competences for certain functions are considered individually. It must ensure that all learners get in contact with multiple languages (apart of the home language and the language of instruction). Furthermore the new linguistic competence should emphasize the cross-curricular dimension of languages and refer to the language dimension in all subjects and other competences[7], as well as support learners in acquiring meta-linguistic skills[8].

Neither forcing the majority language nor a mother-tongue-only approach can be successful to strengthen the European project as the first has proven to be a total failure as 'inclusion' or rather an attempt to assimilate everybody into majority cultures of countries, while the later would result in even more exclusion.

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[5] Council of Europe - Barrett, M. et al (2016), *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*.

[6] See e.g., Muskin, J. A., 'Student Learning Assessment and the Curriculum: issues and implications for policy, design and implementation'. In: Current and Critical Issues in the Curriculum and Learning, Unesco International Bureau of Education, 2015; Pepper, D., Assessing Key Competences across the Curriculum – and Europe', *European Journal of Education*, 46, 3, 2011.

[7] See e.g., CoE (2015). The language dimension in all subjects. A Handbook at a Glance.

[8] Herzog-Punzenberger, B.; Le Pichon-Vorstman, E.; Siarova, H., 'Multilingual Education in the Light of Diversity: Lessons Learned', *NESET II report*, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017. doi: 10.2766/71255.

- Social and civic competence:

The focus here is too one-sided on health (in the broad definitionn of the WHO). The development of physical and motivation skills, orientation in the (physical) space constitutes a value for the citizens, which not only has to be understood as functional. It should reflect the diversity of human beings and their values.

Furthermore, civic and social competences are not based on knowledge of concepts listed in the current framework, but should be based on a learning-by-doing process, on experiencing these from a very early age, that should be later reinforced by knowledge acquired. As the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union is not fully implemented in some EU countries, it is also important to list international treaties that are adopted either by the EU itself (eg. Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities) or each and every Member State (eg. Convention on the Rights of the Child). It also needs to be defined what is meant by public domain. It is alienating for many people if it is implemented as a requirement for active citizenship mainly in the political field. At the same time aligning the definition with the whole school approach would also clarify the definition. In our opinion civic competences are mostly exercised on a community level, while it is also important to include active bystandership in the definition, the need to educate citizens who only become active if fundamental rights and values are violated.

Civic competences should focus less on 'citizenship' specially to ensure inclusion in society for all living in Europe. Thus, it also needs to focus less on knowledge, especially of institutional and regulatory frameworks, while focusing on human rights enshrined in in international treaties more. Recent political and policy documents all acknowledge the importance of inclusion and understanding, so this need to be emphasised more. As for democratic participation, it is or should be made possible for all on local, institutional and community levels, especially in education, regardless the legal and citizenship status of the individual. It is also important from the point of view of mobile EU citizens who are often deprived of their right to vote nationally, while can actively participate in other forms and ways. Parents and professional educators must also develop this competence to act as role models for the next generations, thus key competences for these target groups are extremely important to be defined.

- Cultural awareness and cultural expression:

The final paragraph emphasizes one own culture as a basis for respect for other cultural expressions. We believe that this paragraph should also explicitly mention intercultural attitudes. The 'own culture' is for many citizens a multilayer concept that integrates several cultural traditions. This must be done together with the competences expressed in the chapter on civic competences. What is missing in the description of this competence is learning to deal with an image culture. Society is increasingly driven by an image culture. It is important that learners learn to understand this image culture and to critically relate to it. This can in no way coincide with learning to deal with visual arts.

Besides, while the definition acknowledges local, national and European cultural heritage, it fails to include universal elements and the need to have a view of the culture of other continents. It also fails to reference religious culture, an element strongly influencing personal values and traditions. Only understanding the diversity of all the previous elements can lead to a European value base.

-   Digital Competencies and Diversity:

Digital competencies concern the development of the capacity to have access, to use ICT and to create as well. We understand that living in a digital era should guarantee equality of opportunity to develop competences as users but also to develop an active role in ICT. In order to develop those competencies, the respect to cultural diversity and the development of critical thinking while using and creating digital contents and tools, especially in the growing instances of cyber-bullying, hate speech and extremist ideas[9], is of a highly relevance for individual to deal daily with technological change in many sectors of society as education, work or health.

Digital literacy is crucial for social and economic inclusion and understanding the individual not in a passive role, but as an added value and creative, may promote digital citizenship and empowerment.

-   Learning to learn:

To educate lifelong learners – of current students as well as adults, including professional educators – is the key to the future and the next generations. This competence needs to be elevated and highlighted in the revised framework. It is also an overarching transversal element that cannot be developed in any other ways than linking it to all other competences in a matrix structure. There might be a need to differentiate the description a little as it is not an achievable goal to make everybody able to learn on their own, but rather everybody would need to be aware of their learning styles and methods, and seek education that is conform with them. At the same time well-being and joy (best brought by a playful learning approach) are essential elements in learning that lead to commitment, thus these should be emphasised in the description of this competence.

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[9] Van Driel, B., Darmody, M., Kerzil, J., 'Education policies and practices to foster tolerance, respect for diversity and civic responsibility in children and young people in the EU', *NESET II report,* Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2016.