



# The life skills approach in Europe

Summary of the LSE analysis



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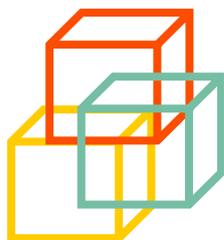
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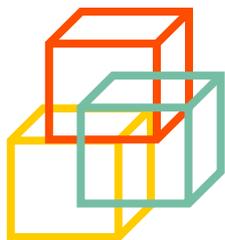
## Overview

The PIAAC results have shown an alarming lack of basic skills across Europe, one in five has problems with basic reading and numeracy; one in four has very low digital skills. Providing adequate and appropriate courses for this target group does not only mean allowing them to escape from the low skills trap, but also to empower them to contribute to their own lives, families and communities. This is also true for the increasing numbers of newcomers to Europe, who need a diverse range of skills to live in dignity with and contribute fully to their country of destination. For all the reasons above, a more comprehensive approach to learning should be adopted. The concept of life skills exceeds the basic skills concept, since it promotes more than just a basis for survival. Non-formal adult education can and should be the driver of this change by embracing the vision of life skills as building blocks for increasing individuals' opportunities in the labour market and in society as a whole. In some countries, adult education providers have already started initiatives to broaden the concept of basic skills, and have adopted more holistic practices in basic skills provision.

The Life Skills for (LSE) Europe project aims to improve basic skills provision in Europe by explaining, further developing and upscaling the life skills approach. The project also fosters a common understanding of the benefits of life skills for adult education across Europe. Through a conceptually coherent approach, the first intellectual output of this project provides an overview of the understandings of life skills in Europe and beyond, and it provides a collection of good practices and innovative tools already used in the partner countries. This brief report is a condensed version of the first output of the project, which presents the main findings of the project research as well as some country specific information.

While drafting this report, the life skills consortium took into consideration the framework proposed by the 'COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning', published on the 17th January 2018. The competences proposed there are included in the Life Skills for Europe approach but are grouped differently. The LSE consortium wanted to give visibility to the building blocks/domains that will enable people to actively participate in life, at work and to society. In the LSE project we use the term CAPABILITIES with the purpose of upgrading the definition of (key) competences. The LSE partners strongly believe that the critical and ethical dimensions are integral parts of the development of (key) competences, which are very well represented by the term, 'capabilities'.

The consortium of this two-year KA2 Erasmus + project is composed of five partners (DAEA, EAEA, DAFNI KEK, SIAE and L&W) from as many countries (Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Slovenia and the United Kingdom).



## The LSE project definition of life skills

***Life skills are a constituent part of capabilities for life and work in a particular social, cultural and environmental context. The types of life skills emerge as a response to the needs of the individual in real life situations.***

### General description of life skills

Life skills are building blocks of independence and self-efficacy. They are combinations of different capabilities that in general enable adults to become lifelong learners and to solve problems in order to live an independent life as individuals and participate in a collective life within society.

Life skills are closely related to the key challenges adults are faced with in the modern world. This means, for example, taking care of their physical and mental health, actively contributing to their wellbeing, mastering financial matters, and coping with the digital environment. When skills are defined in this way, it becomes clear that competences embrace not only the needs of the individuals but also their knowledge and values.

### Advantages of life skills acquisition for an individual and his surroundings

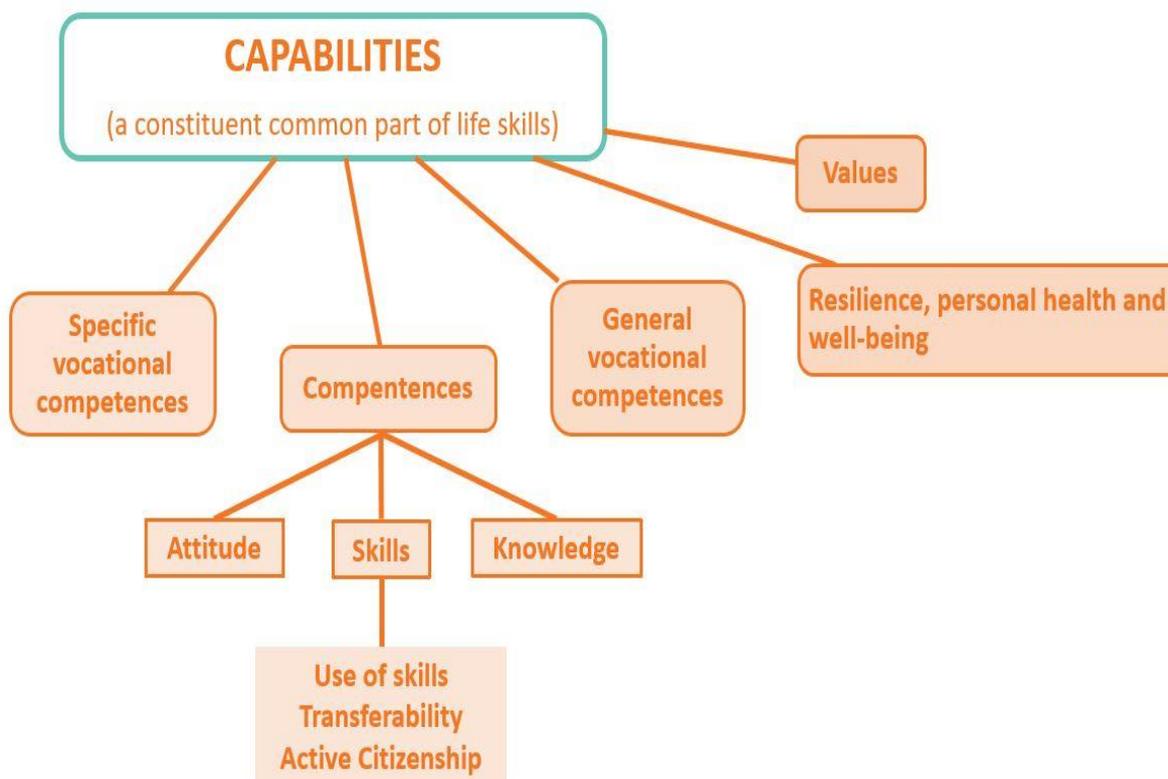
Life skills are regarded as individual learning gains that, together with other gains, provide considerable 'spillover' benefits for their work, families and communities. Better life skills contribute to social and civic engagement, self-efficacy and employability of an individual. And from a wider perspective, they assure coexistence in democratic society, inclusion for all and active citizenship within a multicultural society. Therefore, life skills are indispensable for an individual to act in a specific environment in accordance with the basic principles of democracy and living together in a diverse society. Life skills provide adults with tools to face new challenges and to provide practical and emotional support to those around them. Life skills are useful for the learners themselves, for people and communities around them and for communicating and transmitting experiences among generations.

### Acquisition of life skills through adult education

Life skills are not always learned through education but are often acquired through experience and practice in daily life. However, life skills are related to the educational system: they can represent a key concept that helps the educational system to achieve and measure its impacts on learners. Lifelong learning leads to autonomy, self-efficacy and engagement. Alongside literacy and numeracy, practical skills (ICT) and cultural learning, life skills are one of the principal gains of adult learning and education. The current essential needs of the individual are crucial and at the same time the main motivational factor for the combination of life skills that a person may strive to acquire. The accomplishment of the essential needs through life skills provision enables engagement and a positive learning experience, and as well stimulates new educational need. This, in turn, is a long-term benefit, expressed in greater autonomy, engagement and understanding of the challenges, and finally in new educational needs.

## Key terms in the definition of life skills

The investigation on theoretical sources and the comparison of the data collected in the framework of the LSE analysis led to the conviction that the key terms, knowledge, capabilities, competence and skills need to be clarified before introducing the concept of life skills. The relationship between those terms is illustrated in the following diagram:



Source: Report on Life Skills Approach in Europe. (2017).

The above-mentioned terms are defined as follows:

- **Knowledge:** Knowledge is the result of learning and conquering concepts, principles, theories and practices. Knowledge acquisition takes place in different surroundings: in the educational process, at work and in the context of personal and social life.<sup>1</sup>

- **Capabilities:** Capabilities do not depend on the context. Regardless of specific circumstances, they allow functional responses and actions in a wide range of different activities based on critical judgement. They are transferable among various professions and, above all, they enable individual's development and active participation at work and society.

In the LSE project the term CAPABILITIES is used with the purpose of upgrading the definition of (key) competences. In this respect, the LSE partnership emphasises that the critical and ethical dimensions are integral parts of the development of (key) competences, which are very well represented by the term capabilities.

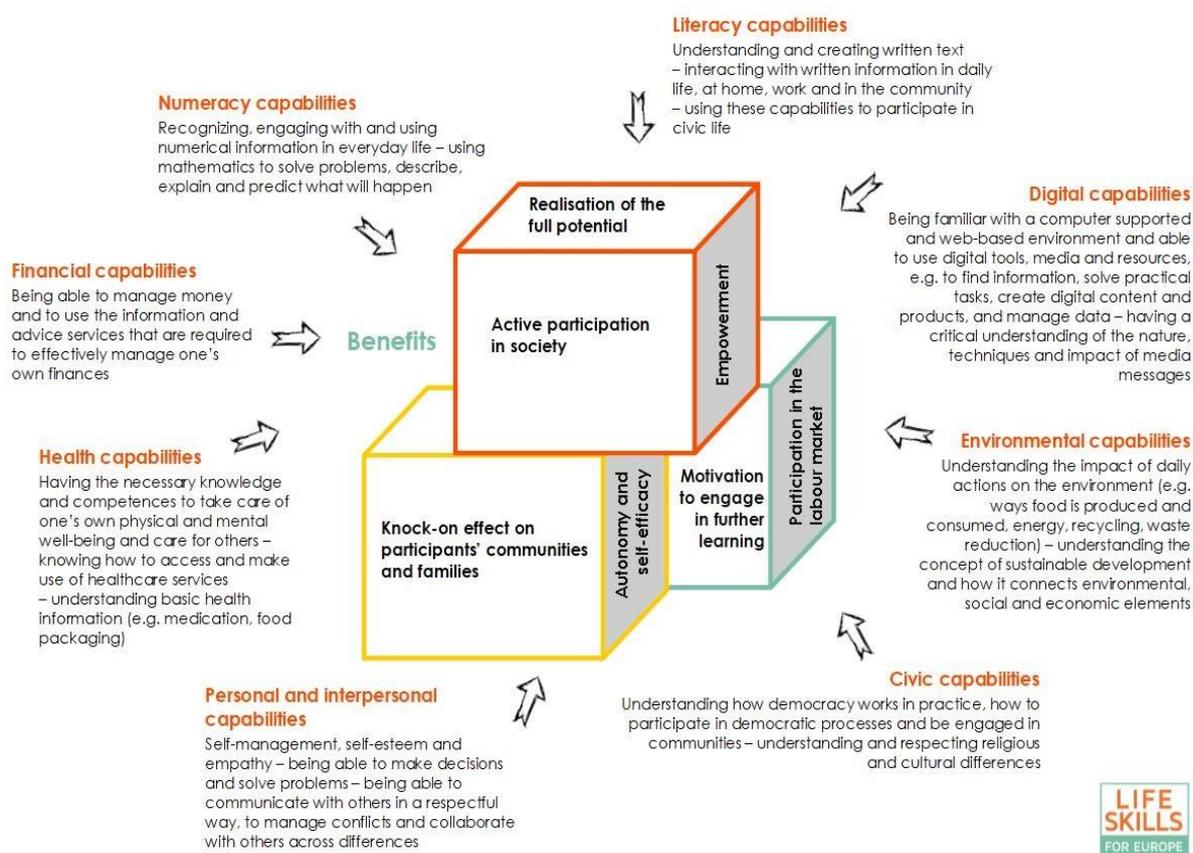
- **Competence:** Competence is the ability of an individual to use acquired knowledge and skills in accordance with his/her values in complex, diverse and unpredictable situations. Competence consists of knowledge, attitude to knowledge, critical thinking and different skills.

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.nok.si/assets/PDF/Slovensko-ogrodje-kvalifikacij/EN/Slovenian-EQF-referencing-report-24-5-2013.pdf> (1.9.2017)

- **Skills:** Skills are essential for integration and participation in the labour market, in the field of education and for quality of life. Skills are a useful and measurable part of a competence. They are transferable, which is an important feature, since they are relevant in many social contexts and working situations. Thus having the capacity of being learned, skills are placed under the influence of the education system or policy. Skills are the basis for full-fledged actions of knowledge-based economies and societies in the 21st century.<sup>2</sup> It is important to point out that skills depend on the context while capabilities do not.

## Components and benefits of life skills

The following illustration represents the eight types of capabilities that are incorporated in the definition of life skills as well as the benefits they bring to the individual and the society.



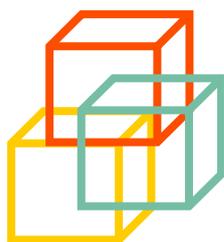
Source: LSE leaflet. (2017)

There could be numerous combinations of these capabilities in real life. The combination of capabilities that an adult needs for a successful life depends on the concrete circumstances and real needs. In addition, it has to be taken into account that capabilities represent the upgrading of the key competences.

The investigation of other existing concepts of life skills was conducted as a part of the LSE project in order to better understand different aspects of the concept of life skills. For that purpose a small scale survey on terminology of life skills was designed that included 24 carefully selected researchers

<sup>2</sup> [https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/The\\_Survey%20of\\_Adult\\_Skills\\_Reader's\\_companion\\_Second\\_Edition.pdf](https://www.oecd.org/skills/piaac/The_Survey%20of_Adult_Skills_Reader's_companion_Second_Edition.pdf) (1.9.2017)

and practitioners from participating countries and representatives of relevant institutions or international organisations. The inputs from the small-scale survey on terminology analysis were very valuable because they represent perspectives on the current concepts of life skills in adult education theory and practice and present new insights for the definition in the partners' countries. Selected concrete examples of those concepts from different countries have been described as good practices or innovative tools that support the development of life skills. Furthermore, the investigation on life skills concepts included a review of the definitions promoted by international organisations such as UNICEF's definition in the *Global Evaluation of Life skills Education Programmes*<sup>3</sup> and UNESCO's definition included in *The third Global Report on Adult Learning and Education*<sup>4</sup>. Investigation was extended also to a literature review on life skills definitions, including the concept of the *Citizens' Curriculum*<sup>5</sup> and several others that are described in The Report on Life Skills Approaches in Europe.



## Outcomes of well-developed life skills

The benefits of well-developed life skills (see the scheme on page 6) are important for both the individual and society. The main advantages of well-developed life skills are:

- **the autonomy and self-efficacy** of an individual,
- **the equipment** of an individual **with basic essential capabilities** to face real-life challenges,
- **the empowerment** of an individual (with resilience and the individual's health and well-being),
- **improving social inclusion and gaining civic competences** (regarding the experience that an individual can contribute to society and the environment by engaging in civic issues and organizing common activities),
- **increasing participation** of individuals **in the labour market**,
- **the positive impact** of well-developed life skills **on the local community** - through knowledge sharing, teaching children and actual physical and emotional support for significant others and wider,
- **the motivation of an individual to engage in further learning** and a positive learning experience.

### Benefits for an individual

In general, life skills enable adults to become lifelong learners, to solve problems, to become critical thinkers, to manage their lives and to participate in the community and the labour market. They are building blocks of autonomy and self-efficacy but at the same time provide the individual with the will and capacity to contribute more to their environment. An adult with well-developed life skills will be 'an adult who is capable', a person who is not only aware of his/her own survival needs, but also the importance of self-development as well as his/her own well-being.

### Societal benefits

<sup>3</sup> [https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF\\_GLS\\_Web.pdf](https://www.unicef.org/evaldatabase/files/UNICEF_GLS_Web.pdf) (1.9.2017)

<sup>4</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/system/files/grale-3.pdf> (1.9.2017)

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/> (1.9.2017)

Societies that systematically support the development of life skills of their citizens can expect them to become active citizens who will be willing to act ethically and in non-violent ways, who will find themselves in multicultural societies and will be tolerant to cultural and other diversities – and at the same time, be able to defend and fight for their rights. At this point, it could be stated that the concept of the LSE project is to some extent avant-garde, since it is socially critical. The successful implementation of the LSE concept largely depends on political decisions regarding social inclusion as the implementation of the concept proceeds in four key processes: activation, internalization, participation and connection. However, adult education providers have a role to play in creating initiatives and projects, embedding this concept into their teaching curriculum or raising awareness of the importance of this approach among policy-makers.

### Sustainability awareness

Life skills are also highly important in the field of sustainability, since responsible and active concern regarding the environment and the planet is becoming increasingly important. These kinds of human survival skills are nowadays crucial for a participatory society. The analysis of the literature has shown that the LSE concept is suitable for the field of everyday life and for the field of work, for leisure, health, cultural and artistic expression. We can conclude that the basis of the LSE concept represents an ethical attitude and responsibility towards society, the environment and ourselves. This is one of the main reasons why this concept calls for obtaining necessary skills in order to live a relatively independent life as an individual and a collective life within society. From this point of view, the concept of LSE is broader than the basic skills concept, since it promotes more than just a basis for survival.

### Boosting motivation for further learning and education

Researching various aspects of the life skills landscape brings encouraging results. Evidence from the claim, literature review and examples of good practices and tools demonstrates that the learner led approach to course design as well as practitioners' attitudes towards learners are crucial elements of the presented concept. The selected good practices initially address the participants' 'current needs' and use it as a motivational factor to boost the interest of the learner to participate in the programs. By satisfying current needs, the adult participating in the program 'incidentally' receives plenty of other content that aims to reinforce the life skills. The crucial part of the selected good practices is the opportunity for participants to co-create the content of programs and create tailor-made programs for each group of adult learners.<sup>6</sup> This further enables a positive experience, which is the key to successful learning and education.<sup>7</sup> Life skills education can have an impact on people's lives. Often people do not see how education could fulfil their needs, but the provision of life skills could change this attitude. Learning can indeed stimulate a new educational need: if providers tackled the real needs of learners through life skills approaches, they would be able to build trust among learners that education was an important resource. In this way, life skills provision could also be a way to foster potential learners' interest in adult education.

The LSE project represents a comprehensive initiative for further theorizing the concept of life skills and for using and developing good experiences in adult education in the future.

<sup>6</sup> [http://www2.oed-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/guidelines-for-trainers\\_en.pdf](http://www2.oed-network.eu/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/guidelines-for-trainers_en.pdf) (1.9.2017)

<sup>7</sup> Javrh, P. (ed.). (2011). *Obrazi pismenosti: spoznanja o razvoju pismenosti odraslih*. Ljubljana: Slovenian Institute for Adult Education. (Translated title: Faces of literacy: Evidence in the development of adult literacy).