UMJ

Understanding My Journey

INTERPRETING SOFT SKILLS:

Research to identify relevant soft skills for young people's
personal and professional development

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INTRODUCTION

Understanding my Journey: Supporting Soft Skills Development for Young People (UMJ) is an Erasmus + Project. It is a strategic partnership in youth in the key action area of cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices. The project is being led by Ballymun Job Centre, Understanding my Journey: Supporting Soft Skills Development for Young People (UMJ) is an Erasmus + Project. It is a strategic partnership in youth in the key action area of cooperation for innovation and exchange of good practices. The project is being led by Ballymun Job Centre, Ireland, while the project partnership consists of REY Europe (UK), ANESPO (Portugal), Dianova (Spain), IFOA (Italy), Action Synergy (Greece), STRIM (Poland), and OAZA (Croatia).

UMJ aims to support young people, and their practitioners, to ensure that the interventions they take part in, including mobility, training, volunteering and entrepreneurship programmes, have maximum impact in terms of soft skill development that can be quantified and built upon.

The project partners work with young people on initiatives that aim to increase employability and develop soft skills. We have observed, and participants have reported, significant change in terms of personal development but they are less able to break down and articulate how they have changed, using practical & tangible examples of SSD.

The project partners offer opportunities to young people to develop their skills and equip themselves for employment in the future, through a range of interventions. We are seeking to support the transition period and equip young people with skills for employability such as work ethic, attitude, communication skills, emotional intelligence & other personal attributes crucial forcareer success.

We will develop tools to support young people to reflect on the soft skills they have developed through participation in a specific activity. We are a diverse partnership, in our organisational profiles & target groups, which will facilitate powerful collaboration for tools to be developed and applied in different contexts. The objectives of the project are:

• Improve young people's engagement with & ownership of soft skill development

• Increase young people's employability

• Raise awareness of the importance of soft skill development. To achieve this we will:

> • *Identify the most important & relevant SS for young people, in terms of personal & professional development*
> • *Gain an insight into existing good practice in supporting young people to recognise achievement in relation to SS*
> • *Develop a toolkit to guide young people to assess their achievements in terms of SSD and support them to recognise & articulate progress*
> • *Provide guidance for practitioners working with young people to support them to integrate the toolkit and ensure that young people are empowered to take ownership of their SSD.*

The first step in the project is this research report. Research has been carried out by all partners over the past six months and the findings have been consolidated in this report. It is envisaged that this report will inform the development of the aforementioned tools to support soft skill development and mapping for young people across Europe. The entire partnership would like to take this opportunity to thank the young people and stakeholders who participated in the focus group and contributed to the research findings.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The UMJ partnership established an initial definition for soft skills to guide the research. The definition was kept quite broad intentionally to allow the research to guide the outcome of definitions of soft skills. This research was carried out through youth focus groups, stakeholder focus groups and surveys, and local mapping.

The youth focus groups established that there is a mixed level of knowledge of soft skills amongst young people across Europe. This is in no way unrelated to the various terms used to describe soft skills by different stakeholders which can prove confusing for young people. When discussing what they considered to be important soft skills young people made no differentiation between personal development soft skills.

For example, young people listed terms such as communication skills and resilience as being important soft skills. It should also be noted that while young people could list several soft skills that they felt were important they often struggled to give examples of their own soft skills. This finding was not surprising when it became clear that young people are not engaged in mapping their soft skill development.

The stakeholder research took place in the form of both focus groups and surveys. Stakeholders were very clear that soft skill development for young people is crucial. The groups created a comprehensive list of soft skills which they felt were important for young people in the work place or those who were seeking employment. While stakeholders were categorical in their support for the importance of soft skill development they stated that there is no consistency in the tools used for soft skill development of mapping. It was also highlighted that without strong, consistent tools to support soft skill development for young people it is often those who are already removed from the labour market through disadvantage who suffer the most as they are less likely to identify these skills without support.

Each partner carried out local mapping of soft skills in their own national contexts. The full reports on each country can be read in the respective national reports while common patterns were identified for this report. It is agreed across Europe that soft skill development is of immense importance however the confusion regarding language and definitions of soft skills continues to be a problem. There is no consistency in terms used to describe soft skills and this creates knowledge gaps and barriers to exchange. It is also clear that multiple sectors such youth work, education, community groups, employers and peers all have a role to play in soft skill development. Yet despite the numbers of actors involved in the process frameworks for mapping soft skill development are lacking.

This is highlighted as one of the biggest challenges to effective soft skill development and mapping for young people. Partners have each outlined a relevant case study of best practice which identifies methodologies that have worked well in their national contexts and represent possibility for transfer to new contexts.

The findings of the report were drawn together when bridges and gaps were identified in supporting soft skill development and mapping for young people. It is clear from the research that there is more agreement on the importance of soft skills than divergence and this momentum should be built upon. Language continues to be a problem however and needs to be addressed for any coherent understanding of soft skills to be developed. While there are many settings which play a role in soft skill development for young people, schools should be supported in their work in this area due to their close engagement with young people and their relevant support networks at a crucial time in their lives. Outside of formal settings such as school and places of employment the role for informal settings to aid young people in soft skill development is often misunderstood and so is an untapped resource for soft skills linked to employability.

In conclusion to the report, 6 recommendations have been put forward:

1: A common definition of soft skill development should be established for young people and stakeholders

2: A common framework for mapping soft skill development should be established

3: Support for mapping soft skill development in informal settings needs to be increased

4: A distinction needs to be drawn between soft skills and personal development

5: Soft Skill development needs to be supported by multiple sectors including: Education, training, employment, youth, community and VET sectors.

6: Youth Pass needs to be recognised as a viable option for validating soft skill development

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SECTION 1:
INITIAL UMJ SOFT SKILL DEFINITION
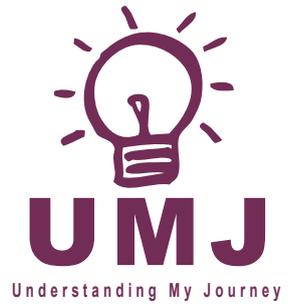
The difficulty in defining soft skills for professionals and young people highlights the importance of the UMJ project. It is agreed by the UMJ partnership that soft skills can have different meanings and interpretations depending on who you ask and the context in which they operate.

There are some sweeping terms which are easily cited by most individuals such as communication, time management, self-motivation etc. However, the list gets more difficult to define as it gets longer. The partnership agreed to keep the definition of soft skills quite broad at this initial stage of the project as this will allow the findings from the focus groups and surveys with stakeholders, along with the best practice mapping exercise to establish a best practice working understanding of soft skills. This will contribute to the creation of the UMJ toolkit, app and practitioners guide. For the research stages of the UMJ project soft skills were defined as such:

Technical skills will get you a job, while soft skills are those that keep you in a job.
Soft skills include, but are not limited to:

- Time & energy management

- Communication skills

- Adaptability

- Problem solving and analytical skills

- Positive attitude

- Work ethic

- Leadership skills (Soft Skill cluster*)

- Teamwork skills (Soft Skill cluster*) *See point below on Soft Skill clusters

When defining soft skills there are some considerations to keep in mind:

• Soft Skill clusters; while some soft skills can stand alone, for example time management, other skills that are commonly listed can be better thought of in terms of soft skill clusters. An example of such a soft skill cluster is teamwork. Teamwork is a soft skill that many employers consider crucial to employability but it not a standalone skill. Teamwork is made up of a cluster of skills such as communication, interpersonal skills, time management, flexibility, self-motivation. It will be important for the UMJ project to identify soft skills and soft skill clusters and in turn break down the details of the soft skill clusters. This will support the development of tools which help young people track their competencies and outline them to employers.

• Soft skill development vs Personal development; the UMJ partnership believe there is an important distinction to be made here in terms of soft skills which are relevant for discussing with potential employers. Personal development is important to ensure a strong performance in the work place using skills such as resilience, confidence, ambition etc. However, while these are very important skills in a work place they are distinct to soft skills which employers traditionally look for in an employability sense. This is not to discount their importance in helping young people maintain employment as they are vital skills to ensure a happy working life, however it is often not the remit of employers to ask such questions of potential employees and so UMJ must identify the difference to ensure the tools created to support young people's employability through mapping their soft skills are relevant.

• Cultural and language differences; it must be noted that culture and language can play an important role in the understanding of certain terms for soft skills. In some instances, a positive word in one language may be perceived as negative in another. An example of this would be ambition- some would state that ambition is a good soft skill to have in the work place as it encourages you to strive for better performance in your role. However, this can be perceived as a negative personality trait in other languages. This must be taken into consideration for any documenting of soft skills and ensure that steps are taken to reduce the chances of misinterpretation.

• Common understanding; any soft skills definition that is being used to help young people in their journey towards employability must be youth friendly and accessible. Young people may not identify with industry buzzwords such as adaptability, analytical skills etc. Similarly, the definition cannot alienate potential employers who are reading descriptions of soft skill's on a CV that they do not recognise. A common understanding of language used for these terms must be established through the project research.

SECTION 2:

YOUTH FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Soft Skill Development is an important feature for all young people across the European Union due to its contribution to their education, training and employment prospects. UMJ is seeking to focus on Soft Skill Development and Mapping for those young people who struggle the most with it. Within the project youth participants will include marginalised youth, including NEETs, young people who are struggling with the transition from education to employment, as well as those identified by practitioners as having additional barriers to accessing the labour market.

These barriers could include:

- Economic Obstacles
- Social Obstacles
- Health Problems
- Refugee status
- Educational Difficulties
- Geographical obstacles

The age range of youth participants is 16-30 years. This target age group was established in line with European Union standards. While this is a broad age range it is important to remember that soft skill development and mapping occurs across all experiences and ages. Like any form of upskilling, soft skill development is never ending and should be an ongoing activity for all citizens, even those who are no longer considered young adults. Equally, soft skill development begins at a young age for most people, through their home life and the education system. Beginning a process of mapping the soft skills they begin to develop is essential for capitalising on them in the labour market.

Each partner organisation in the UMJ project carried out focus groups with youth participants who matched the above profile. There were a combination of young people reached.

An example of the focus groups is as follows:

- A group of Portuguese VET students aged 16-20 who were identified by the VET provider educational psychologist as having either learning difficulties or socio-economic barriers.

- An Italian group comprised of young unemployed people and young students

- A group of VET students from two different British colleges aged 16-24.

- A group of EVS (European Voluntary Service) participants aged 18-26 who were partaking in a 9 month placement in Krakow. The participants came from Finland, Germany, France, Spain, Armenia, Croatia and Italy.

- A group of young job seekers aged 18-30 participating in a part time IT training course in conjunction with their Local Employment Service in Dublin.

- A group of young people engaged with a Croatian youth organisation in a social enterprise programme.

- A group of young Spanish students who have partaken in Erasmus + exchanges and trainings

- A group of young jobseekers aged in their late 20's in Greece. These job seekers have had previous experience of employment but face barriers to re-entering the labour market.

These focus groups represent a broad range of young people who would fit the criteria for the UMJ project. The focus groups were carried out using guidelines for questions established by the project partnership. The aim of these focus groups and focus of the questions were to establish the current understanding of soft skill development and mapping amongst the project target group. Each partner has created a national report with their local findings which are available on the UMJ website. The following is an outline of the partnership wide patterns that were identified from all the youth focus groups carried out.

YOUNG PEOPLE HAVE A MIXED KNOWLEDGE OF SOFT SKILLS

Young people in all focus groups struggled with their initial description of soft skills. There was hesitation to name soft skills and most groups needed further definition and explanation of the term. Some reported having never heard the term or listed technical skills instead of soft skills.

There was an apparent difference between young people in both age and experience. The older members of groups appeared much more comfortable to discuss the topic and more easily understood the relevance of the conversation. In the EVS group in Poland it was noted that the only participant who could confidently speak about soft skills was 26 years old and had a lot of experience in the labour force. The younger participants who had little experience in the labour force struggled with this opening conversation. This experience was mimicked in every focus group across the partnership. It has become evident from this interaction that the understanding of soft skill development and mapping is not generally equated with soft skill level as much as situational experience of having to explain those soft skills.

LANGUAGE MATTERS

In each focus group, when participants struggled with understanding the term soft skills, the facilitator took time to explain what is meant by the term. At this point most young people starting listing different words they use for soft skills: competences, transversal skills, transferable skills, basic skills, core skills. During the Irish Focus Group, the IT course tutor sat in during the session to give the young people support. When they struggled to come up with examples of soft skills she reminded them that they had previously spent a lot of time discussing transferable skills. This was a 'lightbulb' moment for the participants and they were much more able to engage with the conversation. Had the tutor not been present the facilitator of the focus group and the participants may not have established that there was an understanding of the topic just by another name. It is evident that a lack of a universal language regarding soft skills is acting as an impediment to young people discussing soft skills either in their peer groups or with the help of professionals.

NO DISTINCTION BETWEEN PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT & SOFT SKILLS

Young people were asked during the focus groups to list what they considered to be important soft skills for the world of education, training and work. The groups mentioned many of the soft skills that the UMJ partnership had also outlined, however, there was no distinction drawn between personal development and soft skills by the young people. Most groups listed attributes such as confidence, resilience and self-belief as important soft skills. It is important to consider going forward if the blurring of boundaries between personal development and soft skills to contributing to the confusion of how important mapping soft skill development for employment is. It is conceivable that young people are associating very personal characteristics and traits with their soft skill development and so may be unlikely to share their soft skills with employers in an adequate manner, considering them to be irrelevant or inappropriate in an interview situation.

This list highlights the range of terms which young people associate with soft skills. It must also be noted that similar to the UMJ partnership, young people listed some skills which could be considered clusters: teamwork, leadership and interpersonal. This shows an awareness that some soft skills listed by employers on a regular basis require a multitude of skills to be utilized in an effective manner.

The full list of soft skills listed by young people across the partnership focus groups are as follows:

Eye contact	Body language
Taking it seriously	Interpersonal skills
Initiative	Friendliness
Active listening	Experience
Situational awareness	Attendance
Teamwork skills	Punctuality
Grammar	Smile
Assertiveness	Motivation
Honesty	Manners
Autonomy	Creativity
Story telling	Professional attitude
Creating links	Cultural awareness
Emotional intelligence	Personality
Facial expression	Communication
Speech	Negotiation
Positive attitude	Problem-Solving
Personal Hygiene	Compromise
Being responsible	Being responsible
Confidence	Independence
Work ethic	Time management
Flexible	Adaptability
Leadership skills	Analytical

YOUNG PEOPLE STRUGGLE TO GIVE EXAMPLES OF THEIR SOFT SKILLS

In each focus group young people struggled to give examples from their own day to day experiences of the soft skills they had listed. It was noted in the Polish focus groups that the participants struggled to disassociate soft skills from certified training or education. This prevents young people from listing soft skills that they have developed in informal settings or alternatively within formal training and education settings but without a framework of validation for the skills. A similar experience was recorded in the British focus groups where students gave vague examples of soft skills they have developed on their respective courses but could give little evidence or depth of detail to back this up. Participants with little or no employment history struggled the most with giving examples. Many participants reported that they would be unsure how to answer a question on soft skill experience as they do not have a workplace example to reference. Many felt this was a barrier to employment or a potential problem at interview stage. Most participants reported never considering their informal experiences in training or indeed their own hobbies and extracurricular activities as viable examples of their soft skill development. In the Irish focus groups participants were asked if they had any particular club hobbies.

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A few mentioned that they were actively involved in a sports club and they help run some aspects of it on a voluntary basis. After some discussion it was agreed that they are utilizing their leadership, teamwork, communication, motivation and time management skills amongst others in this setting. The participants acknowledged that they would never had previously thought about their extra-curricular activities in such a manner and would not have tried to use them as examples for employers. Where young people are facing a lack of employment history or experience it can be crucial that they reflect on other areas where they would have concrete examples of soft skill development. From the focus group feedback it is clear that young people either do not know this is an option or are not confident enough to use these examples in an interview setting. This compounds the barriers they already face within the labour market.

YOUNG PEOPLE ARE NOT MAPPING THEIR SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

In both formal and informal settings young people are not mapping their soft skill development to the same extent which they do for their technical skills. Participants report that despite picking up a lot of skills at school or in education settings they have never been encouraged to track or map their development. In the Croatian focus groups it was noted that instead of mapping their overall soft skill development, many young people are reporting that they take account of soft skills only insofar as they are required for certain job advertisements that they are interested in applying for.

Some young people felt that there has not been enough emphasis on developing or mapping soft skills in the way there has been for technical skills. In the Greek focus groups young people noted that they did not feel that schools or employers do enough to promote the importance of this activity despite the key role it plays in a lot of job interviews. Young people noted needing more guidance and support on what soft skills employers are really looking for and to appropriately map this through formal and informal activities.

SECTION 3:

STAKEHOLDER FOCUS GROUP FEEDBACK

Educators, training providers, state agencies and employers across Europe continue to place great emphasis on the importance of soft skill development for members of the work force. UMJ recognises the importance of engaging key stakeholders in the project to ensure that the experiences of those who support soft skill development for young people and those who seek young employees with strong soft skills are heard.

The research will help us gather a Pan-European insight into which soft skills are most valued by youth practitioners and employers, and make recommendations for how young people can develop these skills within an informal learning setting.
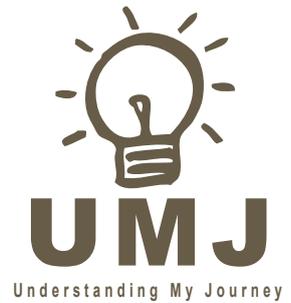
The particular stakeholders we are focusing on within the project are as follows:

• Employers   • Trainers   • Educators   • Guidance officers   • Youth Workers

These groups were chosen as they represent a comprehensive reflection of the actors in a young person's life who would have an influence on their employment prospects in conjunction with soft skill development. Partners initially planned to carry out focus groups in the same style of the youth focus groups described above. However, due to the contrasting nature of schedules and work settings for the stakeholders involved it proved unfeasible for all partners to host focus groups with stakeholders. An alternative option of surveys was devised which was utilised by three partners who could not access stakeholders through focus groups. Questions for the focus group were almost identical to those of the youth focus group to ensure consistency. The survey questions were also developed to reflect the themes being investigated through the focus group questions. This has allowed for coherent and comparable results across all partner countries.

The aim of these focus groups and surveys were to establish the current understanding of soft skill development and mapping for young people amongst these stakeholders. Each partner has created a national report with their local findings which are available on the UMJ website. The following is an outline of the partnership wide patterns that were identified from the stakeholder focus groups and surveys.

STAKEHOLDERS VIEW SOFT SKILLS AS CRUCIAL TO EMPLOYMENT PROSPECTS

Stakeholders in all partner countries were in clear agreement that the importance of soft skills cannot be underestimated for young jobseekers. It was emphasised on numerous occasions that unlike certain technical skills, soft skills are required for all jobs. It was stated in a focus group in Dublin that 'Hard skills get you the job, soft skills keep you in the job'. Employers were represented by Ikea in this particular focus group and they stated that more and more they are looking for candidates who exhibit skills of adaptability and problem solving, explaining that often job specific technical skills can be taught on the job but only to those people who have the right soft skills to partake in this learning curve. Case officers from the Public Employment Services involved in the focus groups noted that soft skills are often the greatest barrier to finding employment for the clients they meet with. They stated that if clients do not have the technical skills required for a specific career path they cansend them on training courses, however their gaps in soft skills can often be the factor that is more intangible and more often than not is the deciding factor in them getting a role they have applied for. They emphasised how important it is for clients to consider this along with their technical skills in order to be successful in the labour market.

STAKEHOLDERS HAVE A COMPREHENSIVE LIST OF SOFT SKILLS THEY CONSIDER TO BE IMPORTANT

When asked what soft skills they consider to be important for young people in the labour market, stakeholders were able to answer with ease and confidence. This was in stark contrast to the experience of youth focus groups. There was clear consistency across all of the focus groups and surveys that skills such as team work, communication, listening skills, problem solving and leadership skills are considered important for young people by the stakeholders. Through the surveys used, respondents were asked to rate the importance of ten soft skills, with communication coming out as the most important is all surveys.

It should be noted that similar to the UMJ partnership and youth focus groups, the stakeholders also listed teamwork as a soft skill cluster, listing a number of soft skills that are required to possess good team working skills. They also listed interpersonal skills as a soft skill cluster. This highlights a shared understanding between young people and stakeholders that soft skills are not one dimensional and often required the worker to draw on multiple skill sets to perform in an effective manner.

While listing soft skills the stakeholders also listed a number of personal development themed skills such as confidence, resilience and self-belief. This again mirrors the perspective of young people who feel these are important in the work place. Many of the skills listed that could be grouped under a personal development cluster can be related to the field of wellness and mental health. Stakeholders noted that these skills are often the bedrock for development of other soft or technical skills. Consideration should be given to how these fit within the remit of soft skills and how do young people map something that is not typically placed on a CV but at the same time considered important to the performance of every job.

The full list of soft skills named by the stakeholders are listed below:

Anger management	Motivation
Team work (self-awareness, empathy, knowing one's role in a team, negotiation, communication)	Interpersonal skills (communication, awareness, approachability, empathy, assertiveness, active listening)
Work ethic	Time management
Communication	Attitude
Eye contact	Verbal and non-verbal communication
Manners	Decision making
Listening skills	Problem solving
Flexibility	Situational awareness
Leadership skills	Confidence
Collaboration	Responsibility
Self-evaluation	Conflict Management
Stress management	Resilience
Adaptability	Creativity
Positivity	Self-belief
Assertiveness	Autonomy

THERE IS NO CONSISTENCY IN TOOLS USED BY STAKEHOLDERS TO SUPPORT SOFT SKILL MAPPING

Stakeholders in all partnership countries noted different mechanisms for supporting young people map their soft skill development. Many of the stakeholders reported using informal techniques to support young people map their soft skill development. One of the participants in Italy noted that they don't use any formal modules or procedures in this respect, but hold face to face meetings with young people and ask them to reflect on their experiences and relate this back to soft skill development. This provides them with examples for interview scenarios. This was mirrored by practitioners in Dublin who stated that over time they build a relationship with the client, getting to know them and their lives. This allows them to investigate with the young person what relevant experiences they have to use at an interview to demonstrate their soft skills. This is reinforced with mock interviews by a number of stakeholders.

Many stakeholders mentioned supporting young people to place their soft skills on their CV in an appropriate manner in order to highlight them to potential employers. Employers who participated in their research however all agreed that soft skills are mostly investigated at an interview and less at application and CV stage. Participants in Croatia and Greece both noted that they asked open ended questions regarding hypothetical examples or ask young people to demonstrate their experience with a certain soft skill. This would indicate that time spent on mock interviews could potentially be much more valuable as an exercise to help young people demonstrate their soft skills. It is important to highlight here that many of these techniques are mentioned in relation to specific time periods or relationships with clients and are not an ongoing structure for the young people. They appear to be tools of presentation rather than mapping of development over an ongoing period.

Some stakeholders reported using various frameworks for mapping and validation of soft skill development for young people but none of them reported any form of national or European accreditation or acceptance. Youth Pass as mentioned by some stakeholders however the majority stated they had not heard of it and no employer in the research felt they knew enough about it to take it as a validation of skills. It is evident that the support for mapping soft skill development for young people is ad hoc and there are few consistencies across services.

YOUNG PEOPLE WITHOUT THE RIGHT SOCIAL SUPPORTS FACE BARRIERS TO DEVELOPING SOFT SKILLS

When asked where they felt young people develop their soft skills, family and peer groups were named amongst the most important by stakeholders across the research. While there were other areas of influence such as work placements, education and media, it seems that none of these compare to the influence of the day to day relationships in a young person's life. Practitioners in Dublin commented that often the lack of role models or peers with similar ambition to succeed in the labour market can present as a barrier for some young people. This can place them at a distance from the labour market and leave them vulnerable to gaps in their soft skill development. Stakeholders noted that many of the soft skills they listed are learned from experience or observation of those around you. Young people who are coming from jobless or disadvantaged households are often not exposed to these skills on a regular basis and so face greater challenges in developing them compared to some of their peers. This places them at a greater distance from the labour market. Practitioners state that these barriers cannot be overcome through simple activities of mapping gaps in soft skill development, it can require being embedded in a larger holistic programme of supports to help young people address the multiple barriers they may have.

SECTION 4:
LOCAL MAPPING

This section of the report is again drawn from the national reports from each partner country. While it attempts to draw out overall patterns of experiences across the partner countries to reach recommendations for progression of a project with potential for European reach and applicability, it is impossible to reflect every nuance within the partner countries. It is recommended that this particular part of the report is read in conjunction with the corresponding section 5 of the 8 individual partner national reports.

Partners, using a combination of insight from the youth and stakeholder focus groups, supplemented by desk research have each mapped the understanding of soft skill development for young people, the frameworks available for mapping this activity and the experiences of organisations who are attempting to support this work in each of their own countries. It also sought to identify examples of best practice for the development and mapping of soft skills for young people.

4.1: THE CURRENT UNDERSTANDING OF
SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE

Soft skill development for young people is acknowledged in national contexts as crucially important, with the caveat however that there seems to be little coherence in definitions of soft skills or understandings of what precisely constitutes soft skills. This may be the most important point in this research; there are multiple understandings of soft skill development for young people and this is leading to confusion of what is expected of young people in a global market place.

This confusion begins with the title of the topic at hand. Partners identified that multiple names can be utilized for soft skills depending on the[1] context and stakeholders involved. In Britain for example it was pointed out that employers more commonly utilize the term soft skills whereas the VET sector are more likely to use transferable skills. This is different again to the Council of the Europe Union who in the recent recommendations on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning categorised soft skills under the phrase competences. Terms that one would usually imagine to appear on a soft skills list are found within this list of 8 competencies, alongside competences that could be categorised as technical or hard skills. It is unsurprising that when differences are appearing as soon as naming the term, soft skills can be a difficult field to navigate who young people who are attempting to map their development. If young people are engaging with multiple agencies, for example state versus community settings, there is a strong possibility that something will be lost in translation as there is not a common language being utilized for discussions of soft skills development.

While the language of soft skill development presents as problematic across Europe, there is overwhelming acknowledgement of the importance of soft skill development, in particular for young people. Indeed, within the aforementioned Council of the European Union recommendations the importance of a dynamic and continually developing set of skills for young people is referred to as essential in a rapidly evolving global society. These competencies are outlined as being needed for young people's roles as citizens and potential employees. Sectors that are mentioned as having a role to play in supporting the development of the competences outlined by the council are wide ranging, placing responsibility on governments actors right down to grassroots sports clubs.

[1]https://ec.europa.eu/education/sites/education/files/recommendation-key-competences-lifelong-learning.pdf

This indicates that all parts of a young person's life have an impact on their soft skill development. The role to be played by multiple facets of a young person's life in śoft skill development was evidenced in the local mapping. Multiple stakeholders were identified as having a key understanding of soft skills development within national contexts. These included government skill strategies, education providers, private sector stakeholders, VET and Youth organisations, as well as NGOs.

For example, soft skills are noted in Ireland's National Skill Strategy 2025 as being important to develop and maintain for young people's employment prospects. The Irish Department of Education further provides input on soft skills development in young people through the provision of a Social Physical and Health education module in secondary school which also emphasises the important role that the youth sector have to play in providing support and opportunities for young people to develop these skills. The emphasis placed on soft skill development for young people further extends to organisations such as Foroige, a national youth organisation working with young people across Ireland to develop these skills in informal settings. The acknowledgment of the importance of soft skills by all of these stakeholders is universal across the partner reports. However, while multiple stakeholders are attempting to support young people in their soft skill development there are no overarching frameworks of validating or mapping these skills. This could arise from the difference in understanding of what constitutes soft skills and how they should be described. This will be covered in more detail in section 4.2.

Overall, it is clear from the local mapping that there is acknowledgement across Europe that soft skill development is essential for young people. There is no dispute that hard or technical skills are no longer enough in the global working environment and they need to be supplemented by soft skills. Stakeholders at European, national and local level all have a vested interest in supporting this development of soft skills however there are difficulties in language and frameworks under which to carry out this work.

4.2: THE CURRENT FRAMEWORKS FOR RECOGNISING SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR YOUNG PEOPLE IN PARTNER COUNTRIES

The recognition of soft skill development for young people through formal frameworks is limited across Europe. The Council of the European Union outlined in their recommendations that there needs to be continued efforts to progress the assessment and validation of key competences that have been established under ET2020. There is a recognition that this process has not been completely successful to date and needs to be continued. Recognition of soft skill development at a European level is currently facilitated through Youth Pass and Euro Pass. Youth Pass is a tool to document skill development within the Youth in Action programmes for 2007-2013, and 2014-2020, under the umbrella of Erasmus +. It focuses on supporting the European Commission's goal to validate learnings from informal settings. It also focuses on strengthening the recognition of Youth Work across the union. It aims to improve the employability of young people and youth workers by providing a validation for their skills developed in a non-formal setting that might otherwise be difficult to express to employers.

While the Youth Pass programme represents the most advanced system in which to validate soft skill development for young people in Europe it is still not widely recognised or utilized according to the national reports from each partner.

Only two countries reported that Youth Pass is used on a regular basis by organisations supporting the development of soft skills for young people. Youth Pass is used in Spain and Poland to support young people who are participating in Erasmus + programmes to validate the skills they have acquired during their participation. However, both partners noted that while youth organisations actively seek to use this tool the validation it is not widely recognised by employers for example and so this poses a barrier to young people who wish to use it for job applications. Youth Pass was not reported by any of the other partners as being regularly or widely utilized as a tool for skill validation. It would appear that there is potential for Youth Pass to play a key role in skill validation for young people and youth workers across Europe but it requires further promotion to ensure it is recognised by key stakeholders who young people are presenting it to. Looking to individual national frameworks for soft skill development validation for young people, there is a consistency in all partner reports that there are no institutional frameworks utilized by all organisations in each national context. Many partners report that while there is a focus on soft skill development from governments and youth & community organisations, any frameworks for validating these skills tend to be developed on a more local basis and can be described as ad hoc at best.

In Croatia it is reported that there is a focus on lifelong learning by government bodies and increased emphasis is being placed on development of soft skills for young people, and particularly creating frameworks for competences to be developed through a guidance process. However, in the meantime the majority of all soft skill development mapping and validation is supported by community and youth organisations in informal settings without any consistent framework.

There are some instances of framework developments that operate within a specific cohort of services for young people. Youth Reach, a Department of Education and Skills programme for early school leavers aged 15-20 in Ireland, has developed its own soft skill framework for use with its students. The framework is comprised of broad categories of competences, or soft skills, and the staff in Youth Reach centres work with students to map their development of these soft skill competences according to a 10 point scale. This framework is being reviewed to assess how effectively it is implemented across the Youth Reach centres with consideration being given to how interpretations of these skills by different staff members can impact on its roll out. While this framework is an example of organisations providing their own answer to the problem of measurement and validation and soft skills, it also highlights the ad hoc nature of the way this occurs. In no instance have partners identified a framework for soft skills validation that is comparable to the national frameworks available to validate technical or hard skills.

4.3: THE EXPERIENCE OF ORGANISATIONS ENGAGED WITH SUPPORTING YOUNG PEOPLE IN MAPPING THEIR SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Most of the work currently being undertaken to map soft skill development for young people is through NGO's, community and youth organisations. In the UK for example, the prominence of league tables for schools is resulting in focus being placed on results of exams for technical or hard skills, with less time being devoted to soft skills as it is not recognised by these league tables. This is creating a disadvantage for young people who do not have opportunities outside of the education system to develop soft skills or indeed be guided on how to map them. The devolved nature of services across the UK has resulted in much of this work being left to charities. Whilst these organisations are doing some great work on an individual basis, it is once again lacking any coherence or consistency across services as each organisation devises its own mechanisms within the limitations of its own resources.

[3]http://www.youthreach.ie/wp-content/uploads/YOUTHREACH-SOFT-SKILLS-FRAMEWORK-DOCUMENT-Dec-11.pdf

In Poland and Croatia there are similarities in that youth workers and the NGO sector are actively trying to utilize the best tools available, such as Youth Pass, but due to the lack of recognition for this tool with employers etc it can prove difficult to use in all contexts. It is noted in Croatia that gaining access to tools can often be expensive for youth organisations due to the cost associated with training and validation of guidance methods, which is seen as crucial for quality control for interactions with young people. It is positive to observe that quality of service provision and staff training is being acknowledged as important when providing a service for young people however this is unintentionally causing barriers to actual tool use and interactions with clients due to the cost. In Italy a significant amount of this work is carried out within the VET sector. There are limitations as to what these organisations can do as there are no central frameworks to map the development of soft skills. While there is a growing acknowledgement of the importance of soft skills in Italy, the provision of support for their development from a centralised government programme is still limited.
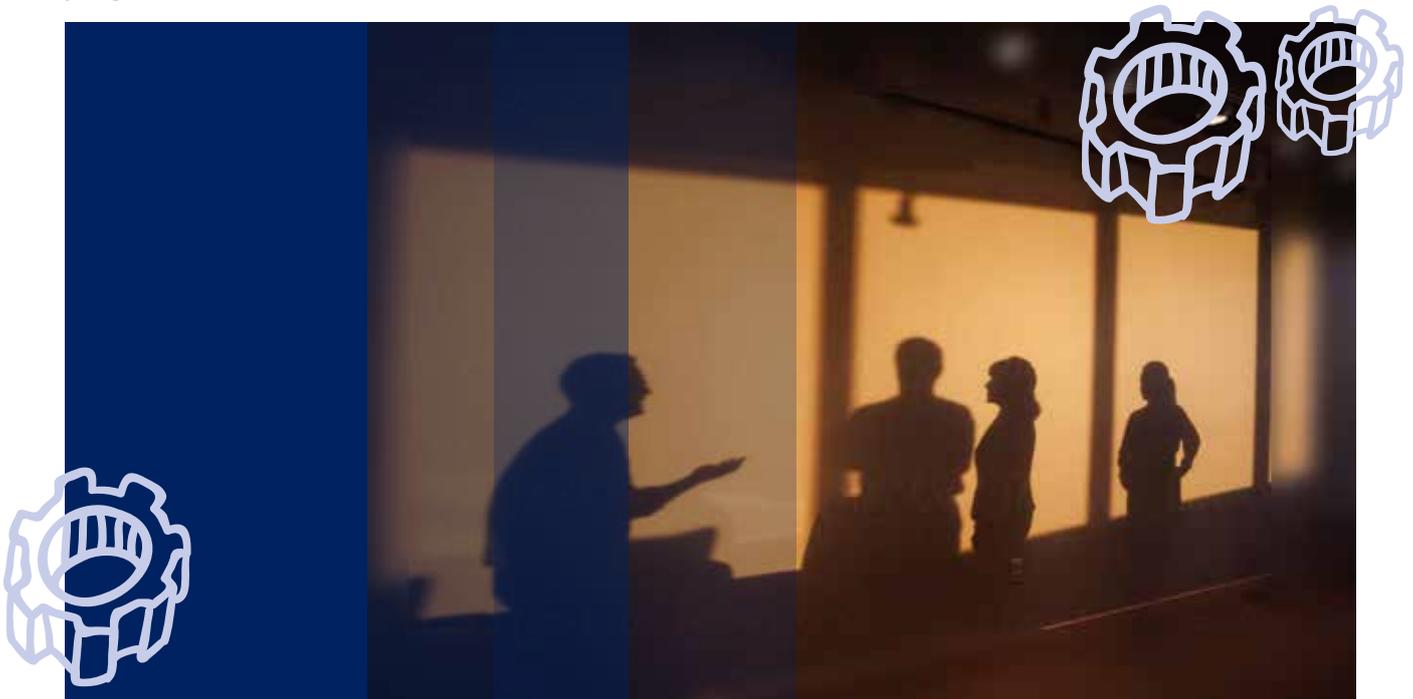
There is a consistent experience across all partner countries in which the lack of centralised frameworks for mapping the development for soft skills for young people is resulting in individual organisations having to fill this gap on a case by case basis. This can also be contributing to the confusion regarding what constitutes soft skills in the first place. Without a centralised reference framework outlining what constitutes soft skills for young people there will continue to be incidences of inconsistencies of how each sector and organisation defines soft skills. For organisations who are seeking to support young people in mapping their soft skill development this is leaving them at quite a disadvantage. Without a clear reference of proven best practice in the area it can result in much trial and error. It is noted by many of these organisations that a joint approach in addressing the mapping of soft skills would benefit from input from employers, state agencies, youth and community organisations as well as young people. This would ensure an approach to mapping soft skills that incorporates all relevant stakeholder views.

SECTION 5:
CASE STUDIES OF BEST PRACTICE

Each partner organisation has selected a programme that represents an example of best practice in soft skill development or mapping. This may not be a programme that works directly with young people but has elements which are transferable for working with young people.

5.1: Croatia

Good practice project name and lead organisation	Bridge to success, NGO OAZA, Zagreb, Croatia, ESF
Short Summary	Bridge to success works with 120 unemployed youth under 30 years to develop skills and knowledge for starting their own social entrepreneurship. They work to develop an NGO as a social enterprise and promote the concept of social entrepreneurship. empowering partners in the project to facilitate their own programs.
Aims & Objectives	Train 120 unemployed youth from Croatia for social entrepreneurship.
Activities .	The educations content of the programme covers 12 personal and entrepreneurial workshops, 4 days of start-up academy, 2 study visits, 2 public conferences and mentorship program Workshops covered the topics of: 1. Social entrepreneurship 2. Finding our talents and passion 3. Defining our life goal 4. DISC personality types 5. Presentational skills 6. Win-win negotiations 7. Leadership and time management 8. Management 9. Habits of success 10. Teamwork and team development 11. Market positioning 12. Business plan - canvas
Critical Success Factors	Interactive non-formal learning with elements of gamification, simulations and interaction of the whole group. In the evaluation 3 factors were stressed as the most important: Good positive society of proactive young persons, interactive workshops and mentorship programs. The biggest motivation to stay in the program was the association with other participants. It is very important to plan group dynamics in the programs. Also good marketing for making the programs appealing to the youth.
Key actors & stakeholders involved	The employment office, marketing company, entrepreneurship experts.

Innovative content	Developing the entrepreneurship mentality in youth by first developing personal skills for better understanding oneself and then soft and entrepreneurial skills.
Results	• Participants got 94h of education • 80% of participants developed their own entrepreneurship idea • 77% of participants had started using new skills and knowledge in practice • Participants felt strengthened in personal development – 4.46/5 with 53% claiming to have developed very much • Participants felt strengthened in professional development – 4.19/5 with 40% claiming to have developed very much • Participants felt strengthened in entrepreneurial development – 3.9/5 with 35% claiming to have developed very much
Transferability	Educational program, methodology and materials were transferred to partner organizations. With mentorship and guidance partners have successfully implemented the program in their local society that they are currently using for their newly opened employability club for youth. The Bridge to success program is transferable to other organizations and countries.

5.2: ITALY

Good practice project name and lead organisation	HARD-SOFT SKILLING - CHARTING YOUR CAREER PATH Lead Org. - Liceul Charles Laugier (RO)
Short Summary	Equipping students with highly transferable skills to help them in everyday life and permanent labour market challenges is becoming imperative due to the socio-economic conditions nowadays. As a result, in accordance with the individual training needs, teachers should be endowed with didactic and pedagogical tools to be capable of boosting students' school-work transition and provide the learning environment with a more real life oriented approach. Hard-Soft Skilling-Charting your Career Path is a Strategic Partnership for Cooperation, Innovation and Exchange of Good Practices among 8 secondary schools, both general and vocational, from Romania, Bulgaria, France, Portugal, Spain, Turkey, Germany and Italy. The scope of the project is the integration of hard and soft core transversal skills learning as part of the 14-19 year-old high-school students' development in 8 European countries, by the use of appropriate methodologies and tools to facilitate the process, in alliance in alliance with the "Europe 2020"strategy for growth and ET2020 guidelines.

Aims & Objectives	The major objectives of the project are: - to develop employability through basic highly transferable skills acquisition - to maximize learning potential, encouraging self-reflecting and critical thinking on how to use the hard soft skills to chart their career path, offering tools learners may personalize and use for self-promotion - to develop awareness of the diversity of the local /national /international labour market and employment opportunities, equipping students with research skills and job searching techniques - to create innovative tools to support continuous development of learners' highly transferable skills, increasing the students' motivation by encouraging collaboration and experience sharing, fostering creativity and peer assessment - to support teachers to practice the ability to work in interdisciplinary and multi-national teams with a direct impact on teaching quality by sharing methods, strategies, ideas and materials.
Activities	**Output 1: Comparative Study on the Use and Need of Transferable Skills at Eight Schools of Secondary Education in Different European Countries** This output consisted of the carrying out of a study which recovered information about the importance highly transferable skills have in the school curriculum and what skills are used by learners and how in the 8 partner schools in accordance to each educational system. The study includes the purpose, the participants, the methodology, the surveys for students and teachers, and the results for the chosen transferable skills, the conclusions and annex 1 and 2 containing the study conducted in every partner school upon a common framework. The output served as basis for the whole project idea and it may prove useful for school self-assessment in terms of use of transferable skills in the curriculum and by comparison to other European schools as a step towards diversification of the skills to be included in the future. **Output 2: Optional Course Syllabus** The optional course syllabus is designed as a course planning tool, helping prepare and organize the teaching sessions of the skill instruction. Based on the conclusions of the comparative study, the syllabus is ready to be used, offering schools the possibility to adopt it as it is or modify it in order to diversify the school offer and to offer teachers guidance into introducing the topics to students. **Output 3: Teaching Toolkit** The teaching toolkit includes 8 modules, 4 modules will be career oriented, the other 4 being focused on high transversal skills development. The modules are organised in accordance with the optional course syllabus and are developed by each partner according to their experience and interest. The module contains the sections, the assessment standards, and the summary of the chapter, the pre/post-test, icebreakers, and personal objective

sheet for the students, course and feedback activities, tips, links(even to the other online outputs created during the project) and glossary of terms, if applicable.

Output 4: Career Plan Model

Tailored as a step-by-step guide towards self-assessment, exploring options, decision making and pursuing actions in order to reach the goals regarding the desired career, this output is to be permanently be revised and updated by the students.

Output 5: Teacher Guide

The Teaching guide was designed to offer teachers accessible ways to approach teaching about developing high transversal skills including reflection on how to navigate through the work related materials available either paper-based and on-line, lesson planning and timely, practical information on all aspects of the instruction.
It includes lesson plans and activities created by each partner following the structure of the module selected in output 4.

Critical Success Factors	More than 450 students and 120 teachers involved in several countries with different "soft-skills" culture.
Key actors & stakeholders involved	Liceul Charles Laugier (RO), GUMUSPALA ANADOLU SAGLIK MESLEK LISESI (TK), Agrupamento de Escolas do Fundão (PT), Profesionalna gimnazia po ikonomika "Ivan Iliev" (BG), Staatliche Fach- und Berufsoberschule Erlangen (DE), LYCEE CLOS MAIRE (FR), IISS Charles Darwin (IT), Institut Europa (ES)
Innovative content	EU project involving 8 countries, specifically focused on Soft Skills development and transferability toward employability impact.
Results	Transferable Soft skills identified: • Time management • Presentation skills • Team-working • Conflict management • Emotional skills • Communication skills • Problem solving and decision making Development of learning products: • Soft skills development for students • Teaching toolkit for teachers
Transferability	The methodology has already been transferred and implemented in all the 8 participating countries. All products developed are easily accessible online. https://ec.europa.eu/programmes/erasmus-plus/projects/eplus-project-details/#project/2014-1-RO01-KA201-002736

5.3: GREECE

Good practice project name and lead organisation	Soft Skills Academy EESTEC LC Athens
Short Summary	4-day seminar for soft skills development, for students and young graduates.
Aims & Objectives	To teach the target group about soft skills, and to help them develop them with experiential exercises.
Activities	Experiential exercises in groups, aiming to develop soft skills through communication and teamwork.
Critical Success Factors	The Academy chose to work with trainers who had a lot of experience with soft skills, and training in general. This is a critical factor, as young people who choose to attend this seminar need experienced guidance in order to tackle a complex topic like soft skills. Additionally, the seminar was offered for free, therefore making it easier for students and young people in general to attend.
Key actors & stakeholders involved	EESTEC (Electrical Engineering Students European Association) Aelia.org.gr, Greek Institute of Coaching
Innovative content	The experiential exercises used are moving away from the traditional teaching methods, and they are better-received from the trainees.
Results	Numerical results are of course not available, but people who received the training quote that the seminar was an excellent opportunity to learn about soft skills and work on them, since it is a topic not very well promoted to them. They also mention that this seminar puts them in a path of exploration for their own soft skills and evolve personally and professionally.
Transferability	This project was aimed at developing soft skills for young people, therefore it is directly transferable.

5.4: PORTUGAL

Good practice project name and lead organisation	"The Company" - Junior Achievement Portugal
Short Summary	It is considered by the European Commission as a best practice in terms of challenging students from Secondary level of schooling to create and manage a small company during a school year and in classroom context.
Aims & Objectives	Identify job responsibilities and leadership opportunities within the program, assess the educational and social opportunities of the program, describe the effect of productivity, attitudes and skills of employees, explain how dividends are determined and paid, assess the business impact on the Portuguese economic system, etc.
Activities	Students have to create a working team and think about a service or product to implement, simulating all the steps since the development of a business plan to managing a small company and liquidating it.
Critical Success Factors	The fact that all students are able to develop soft skills such as problem solution, negotiation and teamwork.
Key actors & stakeholders involved	Key actors are students from Regular and/or Professional Education and volunteers from companies who help students in their activities. Schools and companies are the stakeholders of the project.
Innovative content	The best projects compete during the school year in a specific contest, where schools with the best projects can present them in order to achieve an award.
Results	It is a successful project, which involves thousands of students and hundreds of teachers in the development of soft skills and entrepreneurship, and opens the world of labour to students preparing them for their professional success.
Transferability	It is possible if using specific guidelines for each activity that enable the development of soft skills and sense of entrepreneurship in students. Please, consult http://www.japortugal.org/educacao/ensinosecundario/905-a-empresa.html

5.5: POLAND

Good practice project name and lead organisation	"Together for change" European Voluntary Service Project. Lead organisation: Internationaler Bund Polska, Krakow, Poland
Short Summary (no longer than 5 lines)	The project aimed at breaking the barrier between society and socially excluded groups (people with disabilities) and empowering young people to take action on their own in order to change their environment. Group of 4 youngsters worked in 4 different institutions (schools for disabled children, youth centres) as assistants of therapists and teachers for 10 months. During that period they developed their social skills related to independence, teamwork, organisation, planning, creativity with the support of a mentor, who helped them recognise their competences, establish learning goals and plan their development. In the second half of the projects, based on their experiences, participants prepared their own mini-projects and initiatives that engaged local community and allowed them to see how what they learned can be transferred inti practice.
Aims & Objectives	- Allowing young people to develop skills that might be valuable on the job market; - Work towards inclusion of excluded groups (people with disabilities); - Engage local communities in social initiatives; - Empower young people to take action on their own.
Activities	The main activity of the project was participant's engagement in institutions working with disabled people. They helped in everyday work and in the same time tried to implement some innovations. In the same time the volunteers, who all came from abroad, had to deal with everyday-life challenges and had to learn how to manage on their own. By the end of the long-term project participants organised their own initiatives, such as school theatre play, school picnic, exhibition of photos, that they were fully responsible form
Critical Success Factors	- Activities organised by participants were fully designed by them (responsibility for the task) - They answered the needs of the local community (positive feedback, empowerment) - Participants received help in the learning process and were aware that the project is a learning process (awareness)
Key actors & stakeholders involved	EVS partners (Coordinating, sending and hosting organisations) from 4 different countries.

Innovative content	Participants designed their own activities (mini-projects) based on the long-term activity they were involved in. They researched the needs of their target groups and were responsible for the whole project circle, from the beginning till the end, which helped them develop soft skills in a broad spectrum. During the whole process they received support focused on learning process so they could evaluate their learning process and see the changes in them.
Results	The participants agreed that they developed their soft skills to a large extent. They were more aware of their competence and the need to acknowledge them. Their sense of initiative has increased as they saw the results of their own work (mini-projects). The local community benefited directly from the projects and expressed bigger openness towards new initiatives and inclusion of excluded groups.
Transferability	The framework that allows young people to firstly understand a problem, become a part of the community and then come up with the solutions on their own can be used in different contexts and situations. The help of a mentor who focuses solely on the learning process can be implemented in other projects. Facing participants with real-life challenges instead of providing them with theoretical examples should be the main way of soft skills development.

5.6: SPAIN

Good practice project name and lead organisation	The European labour market for youth Asociación Dianova España
Short Summary	Training Course directed to youth workers and youth leaders to empower the work of their NGOs in the field of youth employability. We wish to support youth organizations in developing an inclusive growth approach in their local communities, equipping their youth workers with valuable tools to empower youth employability, developing their coaching, career guidance and motivation skills, to support young people in their realities to be active in their labour market
Aims & Objectives	- To enhance participants' competences on career guidance, counselling, orienteering, and coaching with practical tools - To explore and map platforms, portals, strategies and websites for European job opportunities and the ways to use them to enhance active job search of young people - To develop a network of youth workers and leaders among EU to collect and promote best practices, challenges, ideas, obstacles and policies related with youth employability in Europe - To share and create efficient and creative models for CV creation and undertaking of job interviews

	- To empower the role of the Erasmus + programme and Non-Formal Education as tools to boost the employability and labour market awareness of youngsters in EU and the Western Balkans.
Activities	Space to network, share best practices, define obstacles and challenges in different contexts, and work together on practical solutions to be implemented in each of their local contexts. To learn more about practical tools to boost employability skills of youngsters, providing them with ideas for practical guidance. Sharing instruments for European labour market and mobility opportunities, furnishing hints and tools on how to build effective CVs or deal with job interviews, and giving examples on how formal, non-formal and informal education can contribute to the personal and professional growth of an individual.
Critical Success Factors	Involvement of the participants
Key actors & stakeholders involved	Students, youth workers, volunteers, NGO's, associations, companies, trainers
Innovative content	Methodology
Results	Participants developed: Communication in foreign languages and mother tongue, Digital competences, Interpersonal, Intercultural, Social and Civic Competence, Cultural Expression, Entrepreneurship, Learning to Learn
Transferability	It is possible, in fact one of the objectives is transfer the BBPP to other partner associations.

5.7: UNITED KINGDOM

Good practice project name and lead organisation	The Citizens' Curriculum: Learning & Work Institute (UK).[4] This is also a project within Life Skills for Europe,[5] an Erasmus+ KA02 project.
Short summary	The Citizens' Curriculum is a framework for informal adult learning which takes as its starting point the needs, interests and capacities of the learner. It posits the acquisition of skills as a result of problem-posing and problem-solving, where new skills are developed in a process of dialogue, discovery, action and reflection.
Aims & objectives	The main objective is to ensure that adult skills provision is accessible, flexible and relevant to everyone who needs it, especially socially excluded groups such as migrants, the homeless and ex-offenders. It also aims to:

[4] See: http://www.learningandwork.org.uk/our-work/life-and-society/citizens-curriculum/

[5] See: https://eaea.org/project/life-skills-for-europe-lse/?pid=3396

	• Provide a framework within which learners can co-design and evaluate their learning together with educators; • Empower learners to relate their learning and skills development to their own needs and contexts; • Link the underpinning skills of English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), literacy and numeracy with health, financial, digital and civic capabilities, as well as soft skills.
Activities	There are several planks to the Citizens' Curriculum: • An Activity Pack for Participatory Learning contains detailed guidance for adult educators to implement the approach, and includes tools for generating themes, exploring topics and sub-topics in more depth, and evaluating the learning process. • A Guide to Non-Directive Coaching provides an in-depth resource to structure coaching relationships and one-to-one skills conversations. • Capability Frameworks map the personal, community and engagement skills and capabilities which can indicate progress.
Critical success factors	Institutions may be skeptical of the Citizens Curriculum approach, since it doesn't pre-determine what skills to hand down in advance – these are determined by the participants themselves. The approach requires highly-motivated and skilled educators and facilitators, and a willing group of participants able to invest their time and energy. Equally, participants need to put aside pre-existing ideas of 'education' and are asked to actively involve themselves; it is not a model which can accommodate 'passive' learners. Beyond that, it is a model which requires almost no resources and can be delivered in very low-tech community settings.
Key actors & stakeholders involved	A key stakeholder is the learning institution. This could be an education provider, but it could also be a youth community organisation, and it has even been delivered in the workplace. Other than that there are three main actors: • The voluntary engagement of adult and young adult learners; • Tutors, educators or facilitators with an experimental approach; • Non-directive coaches.
Innovative content	There is no set curriculum, but a series of clearly-defined stages, with suggested tools and activities, which take learners through a process of discussion, action and reflection. This methodology can lend itself to investigating and analysing virtually any topic. It is visually rich, task-based and discussion-based. Crucially, it integrates some key soft skills into the very foundation of the model, especially teamwork, problem solving and communication.

Results	The latest Phase 2 Pilots of the Citizens' Curriculum were carried out in 2015/16 across 13 colleges, adult learning centres, trades unions, and one large homelessness charity (St. Mungo's Broadway). The findings indicate strong increases in employability skills, attitudes towards learning, social and civic engagement, and improved self-efficacy. A cost-benefit analysis calculated that its Phase 2 Pilot created a total public value of £1.4m.
Transferability	The tools and frameworks have been designed partly with young adults in mind (adult education starts at age 19 in the UK). Many soft skills are explicitly included within the Capability Frameworks, as well as being integrated into the model itself. There are no self-directed tools, although some of the ideas and resources could be adapted and integrated into a toolkit to provide opportunities for self-assessment and self-reflection. For example, the 'Problem Tree', 'River of Life', 'Word Flower' and 'Evaluation Wheel' could be adapted for exploring soft skills, and could even provide a basis for online and app-based activities. Its key strength is its underpinning philosophy, i.e. asset-based and participatory, which should encourage the engagement of young people and practitioners beyond formal education settings.

5.8: IRELAND

Good practice project name and lead organisation	Gaisce - The Gaisce Council
Short Summary (no longer than 5 lines)	Gaisce is a self-development programme for young people between the ages of 15-25. Over 300,000 young people have participated in it over the past 28 years. The programme aims to nurture young people's ability and to help them realise their full potential. This programme is a journey of self-discovery that focuses on four key element: Empowerment, Excellence, Respect and Inclusion & Equality.
Aims & Objectives	• Assisting young people in acquiring skills and competencies to enhance their personal strengths and well-being. • To encourage young people to improve on existing skills or to attempt something different. • To improve both body and mind through physical recreation. • To give young people the chance to take on a unique challenge and gain remarkable experience as they become self-sufficient.

	• Enhancing self-discipline, perseverance, inter-personal skills and self-motivation. • Experience a sense of achievement. • Develop new skills that could lead to a career. • Gain responsibility.
Activities	There are four key challenge areas involved in this programme: community involvement, personal skill, physical recreation and adventure journey. Each areas have certain requirements that must be carried out in order for a person to receive their award. **The community involvement involves:** • Regularly donating one's time to a certain cause, for example, an animal shelter • Spending at least 1 hour volunteering a week • A young person must illustrate commitment, progress and improvement in their chosen activity **The personal skill involves:** • Spending at least 1 hour a week on a chosen personal skill such as chess or debating • There must be structure to the learning and a way to validate it • One must choose an activity that is not too similar to those chosen for the physical recreation or community involvement sections **The physical recreation involves:** • Spend at least 1 hour on doing an activity that requires physical exertion, for example, golf or yoga • These activities should mostly take place outside of school or work **The adventure journey involves:** • Undertake a small journey with a team of between 4 and 10 • Choose an environment that is challenging but within the team's capabilities • Undertake self-sufficient activities such as cooking 1 meal a day • Pick a start and end point that the team mush travel to that involves physical effort and perseverance • Stay in a self-catering facility • The adventure must be supervised by an Adventure Journey Supervisor
Critical Success Factors	The adventure journey aspect of the programme exposes young people to unfamiliar environments and challenges their teamwork ability to plan and execute actions to overcome novel obstacles. Although participants will be supported by their PALs, who are crucial to the process, this programme is largely self-directed and thus requires a certain amount of motivation and perseverance to complete the programme. The participant must be willing to spend a lot of time and effort in order to achieve this goal.

Key actors & stakeholders involved	Gaisce PALs are vital to the process as they support and assist participants in attaining their Awards. The role of the PAL is to agree the participant activities, help a participant to register, guide and continually review participant progress, and finally to review and approve the participant for their reward.
Innovative content	This programme seamlessly incorporates soft skills that are vital to a young person in both their professional and personal development. Focusing on developing a personal skill provides a valid way for a young person to track their improvement and is a source of gratification for hard work. The community involvement aspect challenges young people to adapt to various circumstances that they may not be accustomed to, which is similar to one's initial position in a workplace. This aspect of the programme teaches and develops various soft skills such as tolerance, patience and compassion for those in your community. The overall framework forces a young person to look at themselves as an individual, reflect on their role within the community, in addition to developing their role as part of a team.
Results	A study was carried out using 647 participants to see whether partaking in Gaisce acts as a catalyst for the improvement of the positive psychological attributes of happiness, hope, self-efficacy, psychological well-being, and self-esteem in young people. There was a significant enhancement in the levels of all of these variables in the young people that partook in the Gaisce programme. Additionally, participants of the programme gain many skills that increase their employability such as improving their perseverance, self-discipline and self-motivation, among other benefits outlined in the aims and objectives.
Transferability	This programme enables soft skill development by exposing young people to activities that require skills such as communication, teamwork, adaptability, etc. This programme puts an emphasis on personal development through extra-curricular activities by specifying that most of the time spent on each activity should be done outside of the traditional academic settings. Partaking in this programme requires many soft skills such as time management, adaptability, positive attitude, work ethic which are all required in order to achieve the award. This allows young people to be aware of the value of soft skills and be rewarded for their individual personal development in an environment where they are capable of achieving their goals.

SECTION 6:
BRIDGING THE GAP-
WHAT ARE THE DIFFERENCES?

When the experience of the UMJ partnership, the youth participants and stakeholders in the focus groups, alongside the national mapping are compared there are some important points of divergence that can be identified in their understanding and mapping of soft skill development.

This is true to say of key actor divergences as well as individual country characteristics. This section will draw out these differences in a bid to identify the areas of soft skill development and mapping that need to be address.

THERE IS MORE AGREEMENT WITH SOFT SKILL DEFINITION THAN DIVERGENCE

The first step in this process is naturally to compare the lists of soft skills captured across the UMJ partnership, the youth and stakeholder focus groups. The skills included in the preliminary discussion of the UMJ partnership have all appeared in both the youth focus groups and stakeholder focus groups. There are further skills which the groups both agreed on as being important which are added to the UMJ list below:

• Time & Energy Management
• Communication Skills
• Adaptability
• Problem solving and analytical skills

• Positive attitude
• Work ethic
• Leadership skills (SS clusters*)
• Teamwork skills (SS cluster*)

Additional skills:

• Eye Contact
• Active listening
• Situational awareness
• Assertiveness
• Autonomy
• Interpersonal skills
• Being responsible

• Confidence
• Flexibility
• Punctuality
• Motivation
• Manners
• Creativity

It is evident from the additional skill list above that both the youth and stakeholder groups were less likely to consider clustering skills. They instead tend to highlight individual skills outside of some clusters to emphasis its importance as a standalone soft skill.

It is clear that the soft skills considered important by the UMJ partnership, young people and stakeholders are all more often than not gained through day to day experiences in formal and informal settings. They are the skills that most young people will pick up as an addition to technical skills either in formal education, training or work experiences, or on a more regular basis in their day to day routines and interactions with individuals in their lives. While it is positive that young people and stakeholders appear to have reached some consensus on the importance of particular soft skills, there are still a number of skills which they have both listed but are either unrecognised or not valued to the same extent by the other party. This reinforces the finding that there is a gap in understanding between young people and stakeholders in soft skill development and mapping.

LANGUAGE IS A PROBLEM FOR
YOUNG PEOPLE AND STAKEHOLDERS

It has been apparent throughout the focus groups and local mapping research that the language used to introduce or describe soft skills changes in most contexts. Within this research alone the following names for soft skills were used:

- Soft Skills
- Transversal Skills
- Core Skills
- Non-technical skills

- Transferable Skills
- Competences
- Interpersonal Skills
- Basic skills

It is quite possible that are there are conversations taking place about soft skills where some parties are not aware that this is the topic under discussion. It creates a large information gap and potential for confusion and misinformation. This lack of agreement or understanding of a common language is creating a barrier to any meaningful progression in the development & mapping of soft skills as parties are not having common dialogues in the first place. This was reflected in all of the local mapping where it was outlined in nearly every partner report that young people are often unsure what employers expected from them regarding soft skill development and mapping. This can be due to young people not identifying the language of soft skills used by the potential employer or vice versa. If young people and their support networks do not know what soft skills are sought by employers due to a language barrier than it is virtually impossible to effectively develop and map the right soft skills for the labour market. It similarly presents issues for young people to properly highlight these skills to employers as they may not recognise the language the young people use to describe them. This miscommunication in soft skills is creating one of the biggest barriers to young people across the partner countries.

SCHOOLS NEED TO BE SUPPORTED TO DO MORE

It is acknowledged in the local mapping and focus groups that there must be a role for schools to play in soft skill development. School is often the only consistent area of access to skill development for most young people across Europe. While there are different minimum attendance ages it is agreed that soft skill development should be starting young and schools have a unique opportunity to support young people in this. However, with the emphasis for most education systems being placed on exams for technical skills and subsequent admission into further fields of technical study, schools must be supported to put time and resources into cultivating and mapping soft skill development for young people.

If schools can be supported with tools to validate the development of soft skills it can prevent those who are socially disadvantaged from being left behind in the journey of soft skill development. Work experience is repeatedly referenced as one of the key areas of examples that young people draw from when speaking to employers about their soft skills, however if a young person lacks the opportunity to secure employment this can be perceived as putting them at a disadvantage. Assisting schools to help young people map these skills will help to overcome these barriers. It is also in keeping with the recommendations from the Council of the European Union on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning in which the further development of assessment and validation of key competencies acquired in various setting of education, training and learning should be established by member states.

DEVELOPMENT OF SOFT SKILLS
IN INFORMAL SETTINGS IS MISUNDERSTOOD

When asked for examples of where they developed their range of soft skills, most young people reference previous episodes of employment or work experience. Young people who struggled to give examples often stated that they do not have any experiences of work. Young people did not seem confident in using examples from their hobbies or more informal experiences in explaining their soft skills for employers.

On the other hand, those who work to support young people seek employment, and indeed employers, all stated that they would find examples of soft skills from non-work related experiences to be more than suitable. Many of the stakeholders stated that there is an acknowledgement that young people can often have some of the soft skills listed from non-formal settings but they often aren't utilized enough in interview situations.

This presents another area where there is a gap in information between young people and employers. Where young people face the prospect of having no work experience to draw on it is important that they understand their ability to describe these skills from other life experiences they have. This is ensuring they do not place themselves at a disadvantage at application or interview stage by leaving out relevant soft skills that they have developed in the non-formal settings.

SECTION 7:
CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The aim of this research and subsequent report was to establish the most important and relevant soft skills required by young people to enable them to develop both professionally and personally.

The production of national reports from each partner which reflected on local youth and stakeholder focus groups, as well as local mapping has

allowed the partnership to draw together an extensive understanding of soft skill development and mapping across Europe. From the findings of the research the following recommendations are made:

7.1: A COMMON DEFINITION OF SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED FOR YOUNG PEOPLE & STAKEHOLDERS

The language and titles used for soft skill development differs across contexts in Europe. This is causing confusion and barriers to progression for young people. It is also causing employers and stakeholders to become frustrated with how to support the development of softskills for their young people and employees. Soft skills needs a standalone, clear and concise definition.

This should incorporate exactly what constitutes soft skills yet be flexible enough to evolve in the light of changing skill needs across the economy. Where a common definition is established it should be augmented with examples of the soft skills considered to be important for the professional and personal development of young people. This ensures consistency in understanding of the topic between young people and stakeholders.

7.2: A COMMON FRAMEWORK FOR MAPPING SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT SHOULD BE ESTABLISHED

An effective, centralised framework for mapping the development of soft skills by young people is non-existent in all partner countries. This is preventing young people and stakeholders from identifying gaps in soft skills in the same manner as technical skill gaps are. It is a recommendation of this report that any framework should be established with the intent to support young people to identify the soft skills they develop from an early age and in a number of settings. This framework needs to relate these skills and progress back to employment prospects, allowing young people to track any gaps they may have and seek to develop the soft skills they have less experience with.

7.3: SUPPORT FOR MAPPING SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT IN INFORMAL SETTING NEEDS TO BE INCREASED

Many young people develop soft skills in a range of settings; employment, hobbies, education, social & community settings, training. Much of the focus of mapping soft skills however revolves around employment experience. This can often leave young people feeling that they are lacking skills and creates a deficit approach to soft skills mapping. In order to ensure young people are supported through an asset-based approach it is important that all settings in which young people develop skills are addressed in a framework for mapping soft skills. This will ensure that all young people are supported to identify the extensive list of soft skills they have, not to just identify 'gaps' in their development. Any framework for mapping soft skill development must support young people and stakeholders to think outside of traditional skill development settings and identify key examples of where young people are displaying these soft skills on a regular basis.

7.4: A DISTINCTION NEEDS TO BE DRAWN BETWEEN SOFT SKILLS AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT

A number of soft skills listed by young people, stakeholder, National and European strategy papers have listed items such as resilience and confidence as important soft skills. While it is undeniable that these attributes provide a great advantage to young people in the labour market any system to support the development and mapping of soft skills must be aware of key distinctions between personal development and soft skills. Resilience is something that each individual can work on over time however it can be wreck less to imply that this is a skill that is possible to learn once it has been identified as a gap by a young person. An attribute such as resilience is closely linked to mental health and personal development, an area that is different for each young person and must not be confused with soft skill and technical development. While they have a relationship with all skill development it is important that they are treated with the sensitivity that they deserve. In this manner it can be seen as appropriate to adequately differentiate between personal development and soft skill development in any framework going forward.

7.5: SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT NEEDS TO BE SUPPORTED BY MULTIPLE SECTORS INCLUDING; EDUCATION, TRAINING, EMPLOYMENT, YOUTH, COMMUNITY AND VET SECTORS

It is evident from the findings of this research that multiple sectors have a role to play in supporting the development and mapping of soft skills for young people. Young people are exposed to opportunities for development of soft skills in all areas of their life; their education, extracurricular activities, work experience, hobbies, volunteering, community settings and even amongst their own family and peers. If the individuals within these sectors are not aware of how to identify these skills and help young people map them there can be a cost to the young person in the form of a missed opportunity. It is a finding of this research that all the above-named sectors have a role to play in contributing to the understanding of soft skill development for young people and to help the young people within their remit to map their soft skill development. It must be acknowledged that soft skill development does not take place in isolated incidents and requires strengthening and practice in different situations over time.

7.6: YOUTH PASS NEEDS TO BE RECOGNISED AS A VIABLE OPTION FOR VALIDATING SOFT SKILL DEVELOPMENT

Youth Pass was listed as a tool used in a number of partner countries for validating the soft skills acquired by young people engaged in Erasmus+ programmes. This tool was praised as being useful to track skills developed in informal settings. However, it was also highlighted that this tool is not recognised widely enough and so this limits its value for a tool to validate soft skills. Employers do not report being familiar with the structure and would be unsure how to assess this form of validation at an interview setting. Work needs to be done local to increase the understanding of this tool and ensure it is recognised by more young people and stakeholders as a viable option to validate soft skills developed through Erasmus+ programmes. Similarly, lessons can be learnt from this tool to identify if any of the methodologies used for the validation of skills through this tool can be transferred for use with a more general cohort of young people who are not engaged in Erasmus + programmes. It is recommended that the UMJ partnership keep these findings in mind when creating tools to support young people with their soft skill development and mapping. While some of these findings are bigger than the scope of this project as a standalone, it is important to take note of the wider context in which any tools developed will be presumed to operate within.

UMJ

Understanding My Journey

Understanding My Journey (UMJ) is a project developed by a team of motivated youth workers
and practitioners from 8 countries in Europe:
Croatia, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain and the UK.