

Policy recommendations - SKills for long term unemploYed- SKY

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Erasmus + : Cooperation partnership in the field of education and training – European NGOs – Skills or Long Term UnemploYed- SKY

I. Between European political principles ...

1. Focus on some European texts on education and training.

1.1. Principle 1 of the European Pillar of social rights states that: "Everyone has the right to quality and inclusive education, training and life-long learning in order to maintain and acquire skills that enable them to participate fully in society and manage successfully transitions in the labour market."

At the Porto Social Summit in 2021, EU leaders welcomed the target of 60% of all adults in the EU participating in learning activities each year by 2030.

The European Commission notes that "too few people participate in regular learning activities after their initial education and training".

The reason given by the European Commission is that these people often lack the financial resources or time to improve their skills or acquire new ones, or are unaware of the training available and the benefits they could gain from it.

The European Commission therefore intends to ensure that everyone, at any time in their lives, has access to training tailored to their needs, even if they are unemployed.

Its aim is to remove the main obstacles to adult participation in training, namely lack of motivation, time and money.

1.2 A Council Recommendation adopted in June 2022 (called hereinafter Recommendation) on a European approach to micro-credentials for lifelong learning and employability emphasises that "education and training systems should respond to the diverse needs, skills and abilities of individual learners. They should also provide learning opportunities for all, including in non-formal and informal contexts,"

The focus is on a target group representing the greatest diversity of learners.

The interesting aspect of the Council's proposals is that they place the individual directly at the heart of skills development.

Micro-certification is defined as follows: "Micro-credentials validate the achievements of a small amount of learning (such as a short course or training). It is a flexible and focused way of helping people develop the knowledge, skills and competencies they need for personal and professional fulfilment.

2. Do these texts cover all cases of non-employment?



The Recommendation includes indications on the place of micro-credentials in education and training and labour market policies, to enable everyone to supplement their skills or acquire new ones in a personalised and inclusive way.

Thus we understand that micro-certification is a tool for validating training courses that are expected to be less burdensome and less extensive than usual for the learner, that doesn't present an overwhelming work, more flexible than traditional training programmes, accessible to a wide variety of participants, "labour market oriented" and able to be capitalised.

2.1. The recurring question surrounding the Recommendation is whether people far away from the labour market for a long time (sometimes several years) and no longer at work, nor in training, could have access to micro-training courses leading to micro-certifications?

Indeed, let's highlight the following sentence in the Recommendation: "Too few people participate in regular learning activities after their initial education and training."

Does this sentence effectively cover a target group that has not completed a course of education, does not have complete initial training and has never been involved in a lifelong learning programme?

2.2. The other question relates to funding, which the Recommendation suggests should be modulated by Member States according to the training needs of different individuals. The draft wording is unclear and there is a risk that funding will be used primarily to finance projects linked to higher education (i.e. universities, colleges, and academies).

The other weakness is knowing how the EU Member States are going to deal with the funding. Return on investment of very short training courses cannot be planned in the long term, since the moving and poorly identified target of the programmes are a large public of the unemployed and those who are far from the labour market activities.

2.3. A third question revolves the primacy of the "skills" rationale in all matters addressing education and training, that for more a decade has been talking about "competences" in terms of basic or transversal skills, creating a huge "Tower of Babel" of competences.

The competence-based approach to training programmes has become:

- A bureaucratic exercise in assembling competences already formatted in competence-standards,
- A rationalisation of work devoid of local context and culture,
- A standardisation of vocational training, which has become a competitive commodity.

This leads to:

- A lack of trust between companies and training organisations at local level,
- A hegemony of knowledge to the detriment of practical skills.
- The fact that the unemployed must first "stick" to competences framework instead of knowhow.



II. Background of the SKY project.

A target group outside the field of skills discourse.

The background for the thought that led to the SKY project was the French experiment with “Territoires Zéro Chômeurs de Longue Durée (TZCLD)”, which had the merit of raising the question of the future prospects of a group of people out of work for too long time.

However, the Sky project hasn't followed the TZCLD approach for reasons that include two questions left unanswered by the French experiment, namely:

- how to organise the acceptance of this group of people wishing to re-enter the world of work and for whom individual coaching is essential:
- how to ensure the success of the training, i.e.
 - opening the opportunity of a return to work or training,
 - meeting the needs of companies' skills in the economic or social sectors,
 - creating personal and social meaning.

The SKY project's target group is characterised by people who have been out of work for a long time and who are unaccustomed to training for a variety of reasons, ranging from having stopped studying, inactive for too long, not to mention a loss of self-esteem and issues linked to a lack of attention/concentration because of lack of exposure to learning rhythms. In all EU countries, the causes of population with loss of knowledge include people who have dropped out of school, NEETS, women 're-entering' the labour market, workers victims of restructuring, people suffering from burn-out, people addicted to substances or alcohol, illness, and often individuals shaken down by negative comments directed at the long-term unemployed who are said “you are lazy”.

The vocational training offered to this target group is too much formatted and too long. These top-down courses using theoretical knowledge associated to practical know-how (gestures, inventive skills, etc.) are difficult to acquire by the target group. Many people have a know-how issued from prior learning, have engaged into social commitments or leisure activities, able to master spatial positioning useful for manual occupations. Vocational training courses often rely on information technologies not easily accessible to unemployed adults due to digital divide.

The SKY project is also designed to be part of a process of shared satisfaction between the long-term unemployed and the job and vocational training stakeholders.

The aim was not only to rebuild social links, but to gain self-esteem and personal revaluation beyond acquisition of vocational skills.

III. Work in Progress: SKY a methodology in the making!

1. Ability versus competencies.



As we have seen, teaching methods in technical and vocational training currently focus on the acquisition of competences.

But the word "competences" is used in all sorts of ways, and it is easy to confuse knowledge with know-how, know-how with practice, behaviour with cross-disciplinary skills, and so on. It is not common to assess informal, innate experience, or experience gained on voluntary tasks of the long-term unemployed since they don't match the competences standards.

Sky's partners were therefore faced with the question on how to manage and optimised these "lived experiences".

Between the two learning approaches (deductive versus inductive) for the acquisition of "skills", the choice was made for the inductive way in which the learner is supported in its own thinking starting from a practical situation leading the learner to find rules.

From the very first work meetings with the Sky project partners, the option was taken to define a framework for working with the concept of "micro-training".

The discussions were tough!

At the end, the common objectives were defined as follows:

- Reveal the value and usefulness of professional gestures,
- Capitalise on gestures via a system adapted to the realities of a progressive recognition, enabling people to enter the world of work or going on further trainings that can open up new perspectives,
- Always keep in mind the collective usefulness of the method: the micro-training courses are designed to meet the skills needs of sectors experiencing recruitment difficulties or the capacity to enter in active life,
- Keep in mind the qualitative aspects of successful reintegration and the need to boost the confidence and self-esteem of the unemployed,
- Increase the range of training provisions to supporting people who are the most distant from employment.

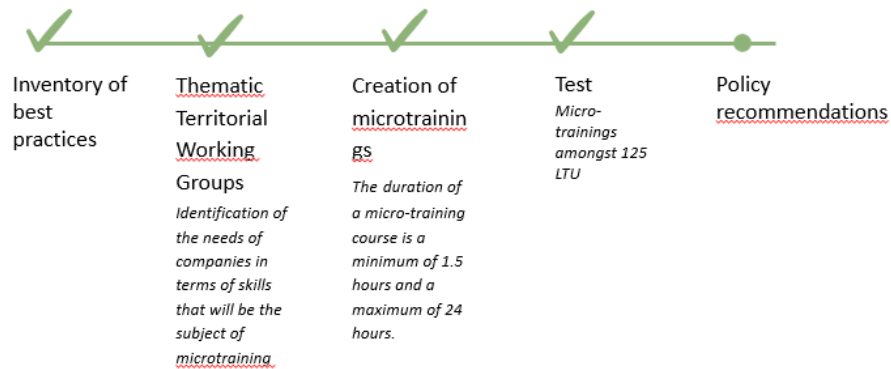
2. Setting up the project and dividing up the stages.

Two axes were pursued:

1. field analysis of professional gestures with employees at work to define know-how specificities through collaborative observation.
2. delivery of short-term training courses based on professional gesture aiming at giving transferable skills to the long-term unemployed.

In order to achieve these objectives, the 5 project partners (AGFE - FR, MIREC- BE, SCF- IT, BARKA - PL, TRINIJOVE -SP) under the coordination of CEC will go through the following stages between March 2022 and February 2024, the last of which will be the drafting of this report:

March 2022 - February 2024



Each project partner has defined a list of sectors according to the objectives of the SKY project and specifically selected jobs opening potential to applying the professional gestures method.

For example:

- **AGFE** selected the Personal Assistance and Care sector for the use of a patient lift as requested by professionals.
Three professional gestures were developed: 1. Preparing the patient 2. Carrying out all stages of the transfer 3. Knowledge of safety and hygiene protocols.
The working group produced 30 micro-training of which 6 were used.
- **Fundacio Trinijove** choose the computer recycling sector (linked to the circular economy and waste management), and picked three professional gestures: 1. identification of computer labels to determine which computers must be dismantled and which will be restored - 2. identification of the appropriate tools and their correct use to efficiently dismantle parts in proper order - 3. recognition of valuable products and knowledge of the market prices of components. Trinijove has taken proactive steps by engaging 29 long-term unemployed in micro-training sessions.



3. Identification of long-term unemployed participants in the project.

3.1. Initial intake: what the person can do, wants to do or does not want to do or no longer wants to do.

This phase is of crucial importance, because the way in which the person is considered will determine whether it is committed to the vocational training project.

As reminded throughout the project, everyone has talents, skills, and qualifications to be waken up. Everyone has a professional project to build, and something to contribute to a more inclusive society, provided they are given sufficient guidance and support. Everyone has a burden to unload, as one participant in the work of the Barka Foundation publicly testified during the final conference.

Welcoming a candidate in this context is almost a “childbirth operation”. The aim of the project is to reveal that everyone holds useful knowledge, talents, and skills and thru micro-training one’s can regain self-confidence.

There is a need to go beyond the most urgent discourse: "I want to work", by searching the hidden or forgotten capacity and ability of the applicant and turn them into an asset for a return to working life. At the end of this phase, the candidate's feeling is turned out into more rational and structured behaviour. Interviews must be conducted with care and attention since a saying often covers highly emotional areas.

3.2 The search of the Delta!

At the end of the guidance phase there is what we called the DELTA (according to the mathematical sign “difference”) i.e. bridging the gap between the desires and aptitudes revealed and the skills to be learned to match activities of a trade.

Our partners have developed a tool called "positioning sheet", which defines the Delta, and enables to monitor the candidate's progress over time in relation to his or her expectations and keep records of what he or she has learned.

3.3. Time was short but not wasted!

For reasons of time constraints linked to the project itself, the SKY project partners dealt with people who were already in the data based and had already been screened. The main input was to refine and develop the concept of micro-training through professional gesture and micro-certification.

The members of the partnership nevertheless confirmed the content of the reception phase:



Reception means:

- Identifying and enhancing the aptitude, ability and knowledge already acquired by the unemployed,
- Conducting interview issued from the specific job framework to put the jobseeker in realistic situation where he or she is confronted with the requirements of the job,
- Use of videos presenting the work environment and the worker professional gestures in the workstation to give a precise idea of the gestures to acquire.

IV. Micro-training and professional gestures in the workplace.

The aim of micro-training is to acquire the basic professional gestures required to carry out identified tasks by the company, leading to a gradual adaptability to a job.

In this approach, the aim is to focus on prior learning and abilities held by an individual and not to stick to ready-made competences determined by educational engineering and multiplied in databases that have proved inadequate for the long term jobless.

We could say that we are dealing here with "a craft of the art of micro-training".

1. Selected definition of the professional gesture.

1.1. Why "selected"?

In the context of a collective experiment involving all the partners, where everything had to be invented, questioned and, if necessary, called into question, it was necessary to "choose" a sufficiently consensual definition to enable the implementation of a shared and accepted methodology.

1.2 Definition.

The professional gesture is the smallest mesh that contributes to defining and acquiring a contextualised and human competence.

The professional action is therefore:

- A concrete reality of professional practice (how I do things)
- An authentic component of work activity (what I do)
- Proof of know-how (what I show)
- The expression of a person's sensitivity (what I am)
- Reproducible in micro-training (what I pass on)

1.3. Conditions for success:

- The professional gesture must be:
 - Analysed in depth with the operator, based on formal prescriptions
 - Tackled according to the workers' experience
 - Described by the company worker himself (expressed in simple and words in use)
 - Limited to a sequence of tasks (e.g. using a barcode reader)

- Micro-training in vocational skills for access to a trade:
 - Aim for rapid employability of learners in partnership with employers;
 - Cover the essential aspects of learning a professional gesture;
 - Are developed by training organisations in conjunction with companies;
 - Include associated knowledge: applied theory and operational context;
 - Take place in the workplace or in training centres;
 - Take place over a maximum of three days.

The micro-training courses are therefore based on accessible language: relevant but affordable terminology, photo language, videos, company visits, etc.

In this project, the tools focusing on work-related activities are in fact videos of work-related activities which:

- Present both the work environment and the true activities of workers at their workstations;
- Serve as a mean of guiding jobseekers towards a particular trade;
- Are used as teaching materials in micro-training programmes;
- Help in drawing up contextualised competences.

The commitment of the consortium partners was demonstrated in concrete terms by the construction of well-structured micro-training programmes, effectively limited to less than 24 hours. Videos were used, with in place workers of partnering companies invited to perform and show the professional gestures. The encouragement given to the jobless enabled them to enrol in these micro-training courses.

2. The need for effective dialogue between key players.

The method requires the acceptance of a process of co-construction of training courses in vocational training which involves companies, their workers and the representatives of these workers in an approach based on dialogue.

This consultation at the level of companies and sectoral organisations is one of the elements likely to provide answers to extremely concrete questions: those more and more often expressed by employers, **but also** macro questions relating to the conception of political consultation in the broad sense to be carried out around education and training issues.

The worker at a given workstation, openly describes the professional gestures he/she performs on a regular basis to achieve the required tasks. The employer prescribes the function and the tasks and sets production targets based on the available equipment, tools and materials.

The integration structure and the training centre mix up the descriptions of the tasks with the effective professional gesture to build a realistic micro-training program carrying out human values.

The job analysis process therefore involves cross-referencing points of view to reach a consensus on the professional skills to be taught and passed on.

3. This approach is innovative in that it differs from the practices of training institutions.

Why? In two points...

Point 1: Discussions with the project partners, the players they have approached and those with whom they have actually worked, have highlighted the fact that this method of mutual works brings:

- gains in working methods and company organisation in terms of forward-looking management of human resources;
- efficiency in the search for the most suitable workforce to meet the challenges of serious labour shortages in some sectors;

It emerged from the work and the discussions that the partnering companies have developed a more nuanced view of the recruitment process.

The SKY experiment has led the partner companies to think differently about how they define their needs and to experiment with a practice of openness in their corporate culture.

The vision of formal recognition linked to a diploma can thus evolve towards a logic of learning accessible to vulnerable people enabling them to enter in a lifelong learning schemes.

Point 2: An alliance on the theme of micro-training between the social partners at sectoral level and regional or national policy level must lead to offer job opportunities to vulnerable people.

The aim is not only to validate and endorse the micro-training method using professional gestures, but also to address, in a positive way and without making them feel guilty, the desire of jobseekers to enter the job market or apply to reskilling training, by using an empathetic language to overcome emotional, psychological fragility and professional fears.



V. The question of recognition of what has been acquired and may be capitalized on the labour market.

Micro-training on professional gestures is the first step of a skills portfolio, aiming at a return to the labour market or attending a training program.

Vocational training is a highly competitive market, and it is commonplace to read that the players in this market are anticipating its significant growth in the post-covid years, because this market offers "growth opportunities both for organisations that will have to invest in developing internal skills and training their teams, and for filling labour shortages in sectors under pressure".

Logically, the same applies to certification, which has been hotly debated within the partnership.

It should be noted from the outset that the SKY project has deliberately shift away from the open batches accreditation system to use a form of agreement between stakeholders based on the learning outcomes.

The skills acquired through micro-training are recognised through what has been called a "gentlemen's agreement" between the company, the training organisation and the beneficiary. The learning outcomes are potentially certifiable thanks to the explicit agreement of the involved parties.

In addition, the micro-training courses are subject to continuous formative assessment, with a cross-review of the learning outcomes by the company tutor, the training provider and the learner self-assessment.

The method therefore requires the acceptance of the process of co-construction of the micro-training programs on professional gestures that involves the workers, the employers and the training providers. This co-constructed approach is the cornerstone of the "gentlemen's agreement" certification procedure.

If this agreement is not included in a binding framework and may seem legally weak for a jurist, it nevertheless has an arrangement value since it embodies a strong reciprocal commitment.

It accurately demonstrates the three levels of voluntary implication of the partners.

It describes the steps that ensure the quality of the project fitting the individual attending micro-training and ensures that the beneficiary fully understands the outcomes of the micro-training, its rules and the expectation of voluntary commitment.

It delineates how the micro-training is run and how the methodology is done and how the knowledge is acquired. It paves the way for the future of the LTUs that subscribes to it.

In designing this agreement, we stressed the need to respect the fact that:

- professional tasks are assignments requested by the employer;
- professional gestures are activities carried out by the workers;
- mutual respect is essential.



Let's not hide the fact that the gentlemen's agreement is not without critics, due to the overly complex language in use, the length and the question of whether it can be opened for signature from the reception phase of the micro-training learner.

It has the merit of existing and formally supporting the process, the aim of which is voluntary reintegration. It's an alternative of commercial accreditation methods that are not adapted to a public that generates neither stability in the management of profits nor prospects for growth.

VI. Strengths and weaknesses of the project SKY, based on feedback from the partners.

1. A regular evaluation carried out with the SKY project partners, all of whom are active in socio-professional integration, shows that there is general support for the approach of acquiring professional skills through micro-training courses.

Evidences come from the construction of well-structured micro-training programs limited to less than 24 hours, by the use of videos with workers in action performing the required gestures and the encouragement of people in the group target to enrol in these micro courses.

2. The SKY partners clearly understood the issues at stake, and their discussions led to the development of a programme supported by all the project partners, thus confirming the relevance of the model.

3. They emphasised the importance of a local partnership for the success of the involving companies, public and private players and training bodies.

We must be open to the establishment of partnerships of variable geometry by building partnerships around public and private actors in the territory.

In fact, it is essential to think through all the stages of the work by organising regular partnerships with companies so that they can identify the professional skills they need.

4. Micro-training courses offer LTUs the opportunity to try out work-related gestures in a number of sectors, enabling them to quickly position themselves to a job activity that makes sense, and then consider attending a training course leading to a qualification.

Short courses help to mobilise and involve people who are far from the labour market by boosting their self-esteem and self-confidence by enabling them to perform work-related tasks that meet the skill needs of companies.

Micro-training courses should be seen as complementary tools to the traditional training system in order to encourage the socio-professional integration of LTUs and give them a desire to learn how to learn, with the proviso that they should be used as a starting point for further training and not as a lifelong training tool if LTUs are to be included in the process of re-entering employment or training.



5. The need for a relationship with the business world was not understood in the same way by all the partners, nor was the need to discuss training strategy with the local authorities.

A major question mark hangs over the involvement of companies and, within companies, the awareness of middle management and the involvement of field workers who are brought in to work directly with the trainees.

Paradoxically enough, while many companies complain about the lack of candidates, few would venture to say that they are prepared to invest in training candidates for work that is not immediately productive and, what is more, using a methodology requiring unusual and undoubtedly disruptive investments in terms of time, equipment and availability of the company's regular workers. This is particularly true of SMEs and VSEs.

It also has to be said that a large percentage of companies finds difficult to defining the "skills" they need, and relying on public training and placement institutions collaboration to do so.

VII. Political messages to the European authorities in the context of the implementation of Principle 1 of the European Pillar of Social Rights and the European Council Recommendation 2022.

1. The debates at the closing seminar held on 9 February 2024 at the EESC in Brussels highlighted the interesting aspects of the SKY project.

In telegraphic form, here are some of the **key words**:

- An innovative, even iconoclastic process...
- Re-learning how to learn, regaining self-esteem and self-confidence, revealing one's abilities to oneself and to the outside world.
- Complementarity approaches, avoiding hasty generalisations of criticisms of the relevance of pre-existing tools.
- It is important to use all the tools in combination, and to make the most of feedback, with the trainees but also with all the companies.
- Flexibility and quality.
- No exclusivity, open to combination with the same methods based on micro-training in a longer course (Fonds sectoriel de la formation Constructiv)
- Participative and concerted approach, co-construction shared by all stakeholders - learner - company - local authority: decompartmentalising!
- It is also important to take into account the levels of autonomy and responsibility when defining the expected professional gestures.
- Importance of the role of intermediation, creating a network, establishing trust
- Shared responsibility between the various parties, collective dynamics
- Dynamic, evolving approach, adjustment during the process



- An approach rooted in the different realities of countries, regions and stakeholders, but designed around the same theme and the same public.

2. Political questions remain!

The partners have listed a series of questions questioning a political challenge to the concerned European authorities, at the end of the Sky project experimentation work.

They are as follows:

- How are the national public authorities going **to integrate micro-certifications** first into their practice and then into the national qualification frameworks? Would we need European guidelines accompanied by monitoring indicators to support the integration of micro-certification as part of the application of the principles contained in Article 9 of the TFEU?
- How can micro-training courses be recognised by the national authorities responsible for employment and training, as a lifelong learning tool for those furthest from the labour market and not just accessible to graduates of a higher education qualification?
- Would it be appropriate for the EU, drawing on the principles identified at the Porto Summit, to give guidelines to the Member States to ensure that training initiatives effectively target the people furthest from the labour market? Reality shows that national definitions of the long-term unemployed vary according to the political performance to be justified to the EU instances...
- The need to re-discuss training strategy with local public authorities, education partners, sectoral funds and the voluntary sector, at local level.
- How will training providers reorganise (planning, human and financial resources) to deliver micro-training on demand?
- What will be the financial consequences of micro-training for stakeholders? We are targeting here the criteria for subsidizing the actors involved in socio-professional integration and the additional cost for companies of taking charge of training on the company's premises, with the company's workers?
- Agreement on certification? Whether this is a good or bad idea, it is a question of ensuring that the various parties involved in this proactive approach are mutually committed, but also ensuring that the skills acquired are recognised and portable keeping the same quality.
- Analyse the obstacles that lead to a blatant need for manpower being set against the difficulty of identifying companies willing to play the game and invest time and human resources?
- The cost and investment aspects of the formula: what public funding should be provided for the financial outcomes of micro-training for the parties involved?



- The relationship with the social partners has not been understood in the same way by all the partners, reflecting the different partnership traditions and cultures in the countries involved in the pilot projects. Can we afford to do without solutions negotiated at the various levels of social dialogue (cross-industry and sectoral)?
- The “schools” and the teachers were absent from the debates: how can micro-training courses be linked to formal vocational upskilling training programmes such as work-study programmes...

