Soft Skills
in a corporate culture

Soft skills 2.0

Facilitating the vocational integration of
people with low levels of qualifications

Version: 2nd of January 2024

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Preamble

This guide is the basis for our "Soft Skills 2.0" project, which aims to develop tools that integrate Soft Skills into human resources (HR) practices and to develop a Soft Skills Work-Based Learning program.

The Erasmus+ "Soft Skills 2.0" is a continuation of the previous Erasmus+ "Soft Skills" project. It aims is to go further than the previous project by developing a Work-Based Learning program as well as tools and methods to integrate Soft Skills into the management practices of European companies.

The goal is to create a method to offer a complete "Soft Skills service" to people who are far from employment and/or have a disability and to build the right educational tools for future employees and for companies who express the desire to integrate Soft Skills into their corporate culture.

Each of the seven European project partners is either a non-profit organisation, a social service provider or a social enterprise working with and for people far from employment and/or with a disability. These people are at a higher risk of exclusion and at a disadvantage when they are looking for a job or a practical course. It's therefore mandatory to facilitate their progress and development in society any way possible. This is done by offering a Work-Based Learning (WBL) method and providing tools to organisations in order to enable them to take the Soft Skills into consideration that were acquired by these people. Working with different countries also means working within different national legal frameworks and different cultural backgrounds. Making sure that the tools and methods created are legally and practically usable in every represented European country is a priority and will only make this project more efficient and flexible.

This guide analyzes the requirement and takes stock of the specificities and possible transferability between the partner countries, both in terms of Work-Based Learning and human resources management (HRM) tools. Thus, it studies the legal obligations in terms of human resources management and Work-Based Learning in each partner country of the "Soft Skills 2.0" project. The objective is to provide a typical European pathway integrating Soft Skills in the recruitment and management in European companies and to specify the modalities of Work-Based Learning in Europe.

Reminder

Our approach considers Soft Skills as personal and interpersonal skills, close to personality traits. They are essential in professional life and complement specialized skills and knowledges. Unlike Hard Skills, which are specific to one or more occupations, Soft Skills are transversal and can be used in several professional and personal contexts.

Hard Skills	Soft Skills
Technical skills and knowledge	Interpersonal and personal skills
Specialized	Interdisciplinary

Soft Skills can be divided up into two groups:

- Interpersonal skills which are necessary to communicate and interact with other people

- Intrapersonal skills which are internal skills, perceptions and attitudes that manifest within a person's mind

Soft Skills are valuable resource in any personal or professional context, and are nowadays sought after by recruiters and employers. They are useful for training, career choice or mobility and concern in particular low-skilled groups. In fact, low-skilled people have less chances to find a job and training ones Soft Skills can contribute to better chances for them.

What was developed in the Erasmus+ "Soft Skills" project?

The first Erasmus+ "Soft Skills" project facilitated the access to Soft Skills for people with low levels of qualifications and/or with a disability, in order to accelerate their professional integration. After creating a framework of 20 specific Soft Skills - the foundation of the first project which you can find as an annex in this Guide – the partnership engineered a method and numerous pedagogical tools for training and assessing Soft Skills. Here you can find an overview:

The "**European catalogue of Soft Skills references**" gives an overview of the project's approach to Soft Skills: it contains the list of Soft Skills defined within the project, the levels of acquisition and their definitions as well as a description of the Soft Skills acquisition process and the placement and assessment linked to it.

The "**Training kit for the implementation of Soft Skills**" gives all the information on preparing and implementing the Soft Skills training in any organisation with any trainees. It describes the training method and program in detail and provides summary sheets for training courses for each level. It also gives suggestions concerning the pedagogical tools to be used in each step of the training or the attitude to adopt as a trainer.

The "**Tool cards to train Soft Skills**" show a collection of more than 80 tools that can be used to train Soft Skills. The tools are based on previous experience of the project partners (tools they have learned with during their initial training or throughout their professional career, as well as tools developed and/or adapted more specifically for this project). These tools require little equipment and can be easily applied to various contexts. The training kit further explains their use.

The "**Training for trainers**" is a program and training content for trainers, technical supervisors, tutors and assessors who want to learn how to use the project's tools and train Soft Skills without problems.

The "**Facilitation techniques**" help the trainer/technical supervisor/tutor/assessor to support their trainees in the consolidation phase of a work situation. It gathers ideas on how to put Soft Skills into practice in the daily work routine, to act as role models and to advise their trainees.

The "**Soft Skills placement and assessment protocol**" gives all the means to assess and attest the acquisition of a Soft Skill. It describes the different moments and methods of assessment and gives you tools to do the placement and assessment properly.

You can find all the tools and details of this project on its website:
www.softskills-project.eu

Now, let's discover what Erasmus+ "Soft Skills 2.0" has to offer.

Chapter 1: New ways of managing human resources

As we know, Soft Skills are a combination of social and relational skills, personality traits and attitudes that complement technical skills. Today, Soft Skills are highly sought after by recruiters (between 70% and 85% depending on the European country) and studies show that 85% of professional success and stability comes from social and relational skills developed over the years. People working in human resources are increasingly interested in integrating these skills into their management and recruitment processes.

For people with a low level of qualification or with disability, being able to put forward one's Soft Skills is a great benefit. Indeed, as Charles Darwin said, "It is not the strongest of the species that survives but the one that best adapts to change". Soft Skills are one of the ways to adapt to change and their recognition and valorisation offer many opportunities: whatever the professional qualification or the job performed, the usefulness of Soft Skills is universal and transferable. These are the Soft Skills that will add an advantage to a future employee's application and it is their identification that will make the difference on the job market or within a company.

One of the objectives of this project is to offer tools to HR personnel and recruiters to integrate and take Soft Skills into consideration in an innovative way in their recruitment and management processes. This guide presents both the European and national legal aspects governing human resources management practices in each of the project's partner countries (France, Belgium, Austria, Spain and Slovenia) and also a European human resources management process that is perfectly adapted to the legal constraints faced by these countries.

1.1 Contextualization and definition of human resources management

What do we mean when we talk about human resources management or human resources management processes?

human resources management is the process of managing people in organisations in a structured and thorough manner. A company's human resources management department has the responsibility of recruiting employees, terminating contracts, training and developing their employees and dealing with other issues concerning human resources in a company.

human resources management processes are the specific routines of a certain company used to handle all manners regarding its human resources. These processes are mainly individually created by the companies themselves and do not follow any universal guidelines. There is not such a thing as a standardized human resources management process dictated by the European Union or by any European country.

However, there are legal aspects at the European and national levels that provide a framework for the management of human resources in each company that ensure a certain standard in all member countries of the European Union.

1.2 Legal aspects regarding human resources management

Making sure that every tool and method created in this project is legally and practically usable in every represented European country is the priority. What are the legal aspects in the European Union and in each partner countries regarding human resources management? What are the mandatory steps in a human resources management process so that it can be implemented by any partner country?

1.2.1. EUROPEAN LAWS

In the European Union, laws are enforced to ensure a predefined standard across all its member states in the following areas:

- Health and safety at work

- Gender equality

- Protection against discrimination based on sex, race, religion, age, disability and sexual orientation

- Working conditions: part-time work, fixed-term contracts, working hours, employment of young people, informing and consulting employees

- Supporting services

- General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR)

The individual EU member states must make sure that their national laws protect these rights. Additionally, according to the European Union's principle of subsidiarity the European Union will only act collectively if the member states' own power is insufficient.

In terms of human resources management, the EU has no specific legal framework yet but two different organisations are helping to improve and maximise the deployment of policies regarding work:

- **The European Employment Policy Observatory (EEPO):** The EEPO aims to improve European and national policy-making by providing information, analysis and insights on the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies.

- **The European Network of Public Employment Services (ENPES):** The ENPES is established by the Council and the European Parliament to maximise efficiency of public employment services (PES).

Since the European Union does not have a legislative role in human resources management, a further look at the legal aspects in each partner country is necessary.

1.2.2. PARTNER LAWS

All over Europe, countries have different rules, labor codes, laws, conventions and specific agreements that contain texts that help to create a framework for human resources management.

In each partner country of the project, the policies regarding human resources management are defined on different levels: on one hand they can be regionally determined and managed while on the other hand, some countries work on national level. It also occurs that the rules are different when looking at public companies or private ones.

The following table is giving an overview on who is managing the policy and where the rules are written in each partner country.

LEGAL ASPECTS REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

WHERE ARE THE RULES WRITTEN?

WHO IS MANAGING THE POLICY?

AUSTRIA

There are approx. 50 federal acts regarding **labour law**. There are different labour laws relevant for HR management in the private sector and in the public sector.

Other national laws regulate the **vocational training** or **specific professions**.

Another relevant source are the **collective agreements** (Kollektivverträge).

HR also has to comply to the **Equal Treatment Act** or the **Act on the Employment of Persons with Disabilities**.

All data processing must comply with the **Austrian Data Protection Act** implementing the **General Data Protection Regulation**.

There are various **EU directives**, that have to be **incorporated in national law**.

The policy is managed on different levels (company, federal, national, European)

On **company and sectoral level** there are for example
- Works councils
- Unions
- Chamber of Commerce (Wirtschaftskammer)
- Chamber of Labour (Arbeiterkammer)
- Social partnership (Sozialpartnerschaft)

Certain policies are managed by the **federal authorities of the nine provinces**.

The others are managed by **national authorities**, which have to comply to the policy of **EU authorities**.

BELGIUM

Code du bien-être au travail - Service public fédéral Emploi, Travail et Concertation sociale (belgique.be)
https://emploi.belgique.be/fr/themes/bi-en-etre-au-tra-vail/principes-generaux/code-du-bien-etr e-au-travail

Human resources are governed by labor law, which is involved in all the areas they manage: from recruitment to the departure of employees, including remuneration, training and relations with line managers, etc.

It is based on a set of texts issued by law, collective agreements and conventions, or by the company.
In order to remain in compliance with legal and regulatory obligations, the organisation must constantly keep abreast of changes in laws and regulations, i.e. keep a legal watch.

The policies are managed by federal authorities. The Code on well-being at work includes all the decrees implementing the Act of 4 August 1996 on the well-being of workers during the performance of their work (except the Royal Decree of 25 January 2001 on temporary or mobile construction sites).

LEGAL ASPECTS REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT

	WHERE ARE THE RULES WRITTEN?	WHO IS MANAGING THE POLICY?
FRANCE	Legal aspects regarding Human resources management are written in the Code du travail (Labour code). Sometimes, some organisations have signed Conventions collectives (Collective Agreement) where additional rules appears.	The policy regarding Human resources is managed by central authorities. There are no differences between states, regions or organisations.
SLOVÉNIA	The main act regulating the field of labor law in general in Slovenia is Employment Relationships Act (Zakon o delovnih razmerjih - ZDR-1). In its core, it regulates rights, obligations and responsibilities from the employment relationship, the protection of certain categories of workers. There are many other regulations and laws affecting the Employment Relationships Act and vice versa, for example: - Labour Market Regulation Act (Zakon o urejanju trga dela - ZUTD), - Health and Safety at Work Act (Zakon o varnosti in zdravju pri delu - ZVZD-1), - Equalisation of Opportunities for Persons with Disabilities Act (Zakon o izenačevanju možnosti invalidov - ZIMI) - Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment of Persons with Disabilities Act (Zakon o zaposlitveni rehabilitaciji in zaposlovanju invalidov - ZZRZI) - Parental Protection and Family Benefits Act (Zakon o starševskem varstvu in družinskih prejemkih - ZSDP-1) In public sector also: - Public Employees Act (Zakon o javnih uslužbencih - ZJU) - Public Sector Salary System Act (Zakon o sistemu plač v javnem sektorju - ZSPJS) A significant autonomous source of law are also Collective agreements (for public sector, for private sector, for different branches...). The rights and obligations of parties to an employment relationship in collective agreements and internal regulations can be stipulated differently or more favourably for employees.	All policies are state-run and administered by the Slovenian government. The basic legislation in this area applies to all employers in Slovenia. There are some differences between the public and private sectors.
SPAIN	1- Spain is governed by the Spanish Constitution (https://www.boe.es/eli/es/c/1978/12/27/(1)/con), which sets out the main rights of people in relation to work and, more specifically, for all matters relating to employment, there is the Workers' Statute - (https://www.boe.es/biblioteca_juridica/publicacion.php?id=PUB-DT-2022-139). 2- On the website of the State Public Employment Service (www.sepe.es) you will find all the information on employment legislation, contracts, types and models, job offers, subsidies, allowances, ... etc. This website contains information for both workers and companies. 3- Collective bargaining agreements, whether at state, regional or provincial level. On the website of the Ministry of Labour and Social Economy (https://www.mites.gob.es/es/sec_trabajo/conc-c/index.htm) you can find all the agreements in force. 4- There are other types of laws related to Human resources management: Law 13/1982, of 7 April, on the social integration of the disabled (https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1982/04/07/13), Royal Decree 901/2020, of 13 October, regulating equality plans (https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rd/2020/10/13/901), Law 31/1995, of 8 November, on the prevention of occupational hazards (https://www.boe.es/eli/es/l/1995/11/08/31/con), ... 5- From January 2022 there is a new LABOUR REFORM, which regulates all employment contracts, eliminating most of the temporary contracts and having as a general premise that the new contracts will be of indefinite character (https://www.boe.es/eli/es/rdl/2022/03/22/5) 6- Labour jurisprudence via court rulings.	Most policies are state policies and are managed by the Spanish government. Some of these policies may be ceded to the autonomous communities, so that they are managed regionally.

Table 1: Legal aspects regarding human resources management in each partner country

Just looking at where and who is managing the policy is not sufficient to ensure that Soft Skills' tools will be integrated in human resources management.
Therefore, we plan to adapt each phase and step of the process to the legal context of each partner country. Because there is no standardized human resources Management process in Europe, we decided to formalize a provisional one. Each step of said process is then analyzed taking into account the legal aspects of each partner country.
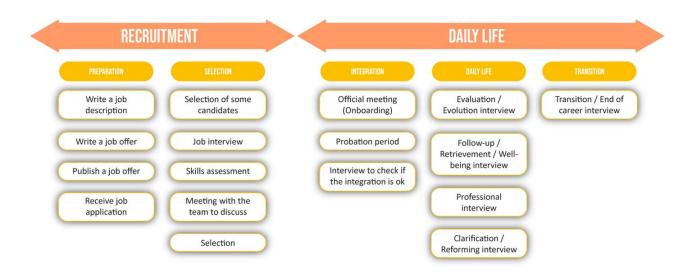

Table 2: First draft of a human resources management process

The first step in developing this human resources management process was to divide the entire process into two phases : the recruitment and the daily life in an organisation. The first thing that happens is the preparation of the whole recruitment process, afterwards comes the selection of a candidate. Once the candidate is hired, the integration follows, which then continues on to the daily life of the employee within the company. The final step is the transition, either to another position in the company or a different company all together.

Based on table 2, each partner was able to examine the legal obligations related to each of the process' steps. Are these steps mandatory in each country? Are there laws or decrees that define how this step must be carried out? The results of this research are presented in the following pages.

AUSTRIA

RECRUITMENT

PREPARATION

- WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION
- WRITE A JOB OFFER
- PUBLISH A JOB OFFER
- RECEIVE JOB APPLICANT

SELECTION

- SELECTION OF SOME CANDIDATES
- INTERVIEW
- TESTS/SKILLS ASSESSMENT
- MEETING WITH THE TEAM/COLLEAGUES
- SELECTION

Column categories:

LEGAL CONTEXT	CHALLENGES AND THE AIDS/NEEDED DIGITAL STRATEGY/MAP	AIDS / SKILL STRATEGY/MAP	ADDITIONAL LEVELS / NEEDED MATERIAL NEEDED AVAILABLE DIGITAL SKILL STRATEGY/MAP	DIGITAL SKILLS TOOLS, SPECIFIC ALSO AS TOOLS

Table 3: Legal aspects regarding human resources in Austria

RECRUITMENT

PREPARATION

- WRITE A JOB DESCRIPTION
- WRITE A JOB OFFER
- PUBLISH A JOB OFFER
- RECEIVE JOB APPLICATION

SELECTION

- SELECTION OF SOME CANDIDATES
- INTERVIEW
- TEST/SKILLS ASSESSMENT
- MEETING WITH THE TEAM/WORKERS
- SELECTION

	LEGAL ASPECTS	ETHICAL ISSUES	NEEDED HR TOOLS/SKILLS	AVAILABLE TOOLS/SKILLS

Table 4: Legal aspects regarding human resources in Belgium

FRANCE

RECRUITMENT

PREPARATION

SELECTION

Table 5: Legal aspects regarding human resources in France

SLOVENIA

RECRUITMENT

PREPARATION

SELECTION

Table 6: Legal aspects regarding human resources in Slovenia

SPAIN

PREPARATION

RECRUITMENT

SELECTION

DAILY LIFE IN A COMPANY

SPAIN

TRANSITION

DAILY LIFE

INTEGRATION

Table 7 : Legal aspects regarding human resources in Spain

1.3 A European human resources management process

Again, in the "Soft Skills 2.0" project, our goal is to contribute to the incorporation of Soft Skills in the human resources management on a European level, by ultimately providing tools that can be used by human resources personal and that respects its country's legal aspects. Before developing any tool, we decided to formulate a guideline for a European human resources management process regarding to the legal aspects of each European partner country. Our goal is to make this process and the tools integrating Soft Skills applicable in as many countries as possible.

Based on our provisional European human resources management process and the research that has been done by the partners, we defined different phases, with a few sub-phases for which tools integrating Soft Skills could be developed. These tools will be presented in the second intellectual output of our project: the Soft Skills toolbox.

Now let's take a closer look to our European human resources management process:

| PREPARATION OF THE RECRUITMENT | SELECTION OF THE CANDIDATE | ONBOARDING | DAY-TO-DAY WORK LIFE | OFFBOARDING |

Table 8 : European human resources management process

1.3.1. PREPARATION OF THE RECRUITMENT

At the beginning of the recruitment phase, it is important to thoroughly prepare the process by identifying the company's needs and wishes. At the end of a good recruitment process, a qualified candidate should be found.

The first thing happening in a recruitment process after **identifying a need** for an additional employee is to **present the organisation** and to define why it is attractive to work there. This document explains, in an attractive way, what the organisation is doing precisely, what values the organisation stand by, what are the internal and external factors that boost their popularity etc.

Preparing an organisation description makes the creation of a job description and a job offer much easier. Creating a complete **job description** is vital for the recruitment process. This should be done as precisely as possible to attract and meet candidates who are sufficiently qualified. The job description is used internally, to exactly define the wanted position, its tasks, duties and responsibilities.

Based on the job description and the organisation description, the recruiting team will **write a job offer** that is used to attract possible candidates. This job offer can be used internally if the company wants to fill the position with existing employees or externally if it is the company's interest to recruit an external candidate. Therefore, this job offer should be **published** to achieve a substantial reach. It can be published on the company's website, on various social media platforms, on job application websites, newspapers etc. Actively recruiting candidates, for example by contacting them on LinkedIn, can also increase the chances of finding the most suitable candidate for the job.

1.3.2. SELECTION OF THE CANDIDATE

After a job offer has been published the company will **receive job application**, now the issue is to identify the most appropriate person for the company. This is the second phase in the human resources management process.

It's the recruiter's job to make an **initial selection** on who could be a fitting candidate and pick out a small number of people that seem right on paper.

The selected candidates will be invited to a **job interview**, which can take place at the company or online. These interviews can be held one-on-one, or with a recruitment team. Sometimes, a company will do several interviews with the candidates to increase the possibility of finding the right candidate. A key component of the interviews is the preparation of the questions.

Skills assessment tests can occur at various stages of the recruitment process depending on the company's priorities. Some companies require an assessment before admitting the candidate to an interview, others prefer to do these sorts of tests during or after the interview to support the decision.

After all these steps, the company will be able to **analyze and select one candidate** they deem as the best fit for the company. Before notifying the chosen candidate a background check is administered. Finally, the successful candidate is informed that he or she has passed the selection phase and is offered the position. If the offer is accepted, the candidate will be hired. Additionally, it is possible to inform the other candidates of the decision and deliver them feedback on their interviews.

1.3.3. ONBOARDING

Following the selection of a candidate the responsibilities of the HR department carry on to making the new employee's daily life in the company a good and pleasant experience.

The company has a social responsibility towards their employees. The integration is also in the interest of the company itself as it ensures that the employee stays motivated, work well and stays in the company for a long time.

The first official step before a new employee is entering an organisation is to **prepare the integration.** HR staff should notify the existing colleagues of the arrival of the new colleague. At the administrative level, the employment contract and all related documents must be prepared. The new employee's workstation must be set up (desk, computer, equipment, PPE etc.). It is also important to inform the new employee of their starting date and give them as much information as possible so that he/she can arrive confident at the new job.

It's only after having prepared the integration that the HR staff will be able to welcome the new employee and **have an integration meeting**. The employee will be introduced to the company's structure, employees and premises. He/she will be informed about the internal policies or about any rules in the company and the required administrative formalities will be completed. In some cases, a colleague can be chosen as a mentor.

The **probation period** gives the employer the opportunity to assess the employee's performance in the new role he/she is occupying. The employee also gets the chance to evaluate whether the company is the right fit. The duration of the probation period depends on the field of work and the country's policies and laws: some countries do not have probation periods at all. During the probation period the contract can still be terminated fairly easily, if the new staff member cannot perform their tasks satisfactorily or the employee wishes to terminate the contract.

After the integration process has finished a **check-up interview** with a manager/or HR manager and the employee can be held to discuss and find out if the employee's needs were met and if the integration was successful or if there are some adjustments needed.

1.3.4. DAY-TO-DAY WORK LIFE

After the onboarding process, the HR management makes sure the needs of the employee are met concerning for example the well-being within the company or any additional training that might be needed.

Depending on the country, different interviews are mandatory. In order to synthesize things and to have a process and steps adapted to all the partner countries of the project, we all agreed on the term "**day-to-day work life interviews**".

Daily life interviews can have different purposes and time frames. For example, evaluation interviews can be planned to evaluate the employee's competencies and needs. Subsequently, the employer and employee can decide whether any further training or education is advised.

Annual interviews can be a way to check up on the employee regularly. In this interview the well-being of the employee, any difficulties he/she is encountering or might encounter in the future can be addressed. If the employee is in need of further training this can be discussed as well. This interview can also be used to inform an employee of minor errors he or she has made and to correct them. This can encourage a constructive handling of problems and help people to take responsibility and learn from their mistakes. After a longer period of absence of an employee this is also a good opportunity to discuss if the previous work conditions, such as weekly hours are still adequate or if there is any demand for adaptation.

In addition to the daily life interviews, an employee may have or be required to attend **trainings**. Depending on the company, these training sessions can be held internally or externally, in the classroom or at the work place and can be integrated into the employee's schedule. Each partner country has different obligations related to trainings: in some of them, companies must mandatorily propose trainings every year for each employee, while other countries just recommend it.

A focus on Work-Based Learning in each country will be done in the second part of this guide.

1.3.5. OFFBOARDING

This phase corresponds to the departure of an employee to another department of the company, to a different company or to retirement. The idea here is to ensure that the employee leaves his position satisfied and that all the steps have been taken to allow him to close his contract without worries.

It must therefore be anticipated as good as possible with an effective transition process. The company has a social responsibility for the well-being of their employees, including in these more delicate moments. In addition to this moral aspect, providing a clear, efficient and caring exit process is essential to ensure a transition under the best conditions. The more respectful the exit process, the more a former employee will talk positively about their experience. The implementation of an **"offboarding interview"** will allow the company to listen to the employee and collect relevant information for the improvement and adjustment of the company's strategies. An internal transition interview occur when an employee change its position in the enterprise. An external transition interview occur when an employee move to another organisation. An end-of-career interview occur before an employee leave for retirement

Studying the legal aspects in the 5 European countries represented by the project (Austria, Belgium, France, Slovenia and Spain), has allowed us to agree on a European HR management process that can be used in all countries. While some steps are mandatory and framed by standards and laws in some countries, others are only indicative and and give companies a certain amount of freedom when it comes to implementing them. Our challenge now is to provide everyone with human resources management tools that integrate Soft Skills and that can be used in certain key stages of this European human resources management process. These tools are presented in our "Soft Skills toolbox" which you can find on our website: www.softskills-project.eu

Chapter 2: Work-Based Learning as a new perspective on Soft Skills training

After developing a method and tools to teach Soft Skills in a classroom setting in the previous Erasmus+ project "Soft Skills", the goal of the "Soft Skills 2.0" project is to find a way to integrate the training of Soft Skills in a continuous Work-Based Learning process.

This training is an added value that meets a need that is increasingly present in Europe, especially since Work-Based Learning is considered as the "best Soft Skills development device" according to the 2020 Soft Skills Barometer.

This Work-Based Learning program is designed for people with low levels of qualification and/or disabilities. Indeed, these people are often reluctant to receive traditional training or digital training. The experience of our partners in Work-Based Learning shows us that this approach to training is perfectly adapted to our society and to the learning of Soft Skills. Developing Soft Skills means taking on new habits, sometimes in contradiction with established behaviors. Unlike Hard Skills, it is not enough to understand, remember and practice to achieve them. Soft Skills require an awareness of our behaviors, a vision and an acceptance of the personal interest in changing them, and above all, the practice of these behaviors in different types of professional situations.

Allowing people with low level of qualification and/or disabilities to put their Soft Skills forward is essential to give them a better chance on the labor market. Giving them the opportunity to train their Soft Skills by using Work-Based Learning methods is giving them the opportunity to evolve and acquire the skills expected on the job market.

This guide presents both the European and national legal aspects governing Work-Based Learning in each of the project's partner countries (France, Belgium, Austria, Spain and Slovenia). It also formalizes a European Work-Based Learning process that is perfectly adapted to the legal constraints faced by these countries.

2.1 Contextualization and definition of Work-Based Learning in continuing vocational education

Why are we speaking about Work-Based Learning in continuing vocational education and training?

2.1.1. Continuing Vocational Education and Training (CVET)

CVET is defined by by the European glossary of adult education and training with the intention to acquire new competencies or develop and improve existing ones. (Brugia & Babrauskiene, 2019, 17).

"CVET takes place after initial education and training or after the beginning of the working life. It aims to upgrade knowledge, to help citizens to acquire new skills and to retrain and further personal and professional development. It is largely work-based." (Vocational Education and Training Initiatives | European Education Area, n.d.).

This concept is important because continuing vocational education and training can take place after a high level of education has already been obtained or without any previous education, which is especially relevant for "Soft Skills 2.0" as one of the target groups is people with a low level of education.

2.1.2. Work-Based Learning as a form of CVET

A form of continuing vocational education or training is Work-Based Learning. Work-based CVET is a powerful way to support adult training/learning experiences. The CVET process is considered work-based if it takes place in either a real or simulated work environment. By adjusting the learning tasks to the job of the trainee, WBL is oriented directly towards a worker's current or future tasks. Furthermore, the learning tasks must afterwards be reflected on, ensuring an enhanced learning experience.

In the "Soft Skills 2.0" project we speak about WBL in a CVET setting at a training center and/or work place and define it as the acquisition of knowledge, skills and competencies by performing and reflecting in tasks in a vocational setting.

Work-based in CVET is said to significantly benefit a worker's inclusion in the workplace, social cohesion. It also helps to reduce adult unemployment and underemployment and encourage innovative, competitive and growth-oriented company and country policies and strategies. (Celleja & Scheys, 2015, 7)

2.2. Legal aspects regarding Work-Based Learning in CVET

Policies regarding Work-Based Learning in CVET can be defined by actors at different levels: member states policies are often influenced by orientations provided by European policy and cooperation in that field but also by national and regional regulations and by social partners and other stakeholders.

2.2.1. EUROPEAN POLICIES

The European Union (EU) provides funding (European Social Funds for example), provides ideas on how to conduct effective training and promotes the cooperation among member states and other stakeholders. It also conducts research and provides information on the advantages of WBL by sharing good practices for example.

The CEDEFOP (European Center for the Development of Vocational Training) was created in 1975 by the European Union to promote the development of vocational education and training in the EU. This agency supports the promotion, the development and implementation of the Union policy in field of vocational education and training as well as skills and qualifications policies by working together with the Commission, Member States and social partners. To this end, it enhances and disseminates knowledge, provides evidence and services for policy-making, including research-based conclusions, and facilitates knowledge sharing among and between Union and national actors.

In 2015, CEDEFOP published the research paper "Work-Based Learning in continuing vocational, education and training: policies and practices in Europe". The study proves that uses, methods and the potential of Work-Based Learning in continuing vocational education and training have not been adequately researched so far. Some further information on this topic would be appreciated by people of different levels in the corporate world. (Celleja & Scheys, 2015, 13)

This publication gives a method to classify national policies for Work-Based Learning. Based on 5 criteria, a country can have different type of wok-based CVET policies: 'conducive', 'just-allowing' or 'unconcerned'.

The 5 criteria are the following:

1) **Work-Based Learning (WBL) is acknowledged as a regular, common and accepted CVET method:** the national policies or laws on CVET mention WBL as a method for delivery of CVET.

2) **Specific WBL-oriented programs exist at national/regional/sectoral levels**: availability of national, regional or sectoral programs that specifically require the use of WBL elements as part of the training methods.

3) **Financing training containing WBL elements is possible**: the main financial instruments for CVET clearly give a good frame for WBL as method used.

4) **Informally acquired learning outcomes are recognized**: knowledge, skills and competencies obtained through informal learning and non-formal WBL can be tested and recognized and act as a base for further education, upskilling, promotion and career movers.

5) **Stakeholders have an interest in WBL and focus on it**: stakeholders implement initiatives which promote facilitate and support WBL in CVET

TYPES OF POLICIES

CONDUCIVE	JUST-ALLOWING	UNCONCERNED
[4-5 criteria met]	[2-3 criteria met]	[0-1 criteria met]

- WBL IS ACKNOWLEDGED AS A REGULAR, COMMON AND ACCEPTED CVET METHOD.
- SPECIFICALLY WBL-ORIENTED PROGRAMMES EXIST AT NATIONAL/REGIONAL/SECTORIAL LEVELS.
- FINANCING TRAININGS CONTAINING WBL ELEMENTS IS POSSIBLE.
- INFORMAL LEARNING OUTCOMES ARE RECOGNISED.
- STAKEHOLDERS HAVE AN INTEREST IN AND FOCUS ON WBL

Source : Cedefop

Table 9 : Classification of Work-Based Learning policies in Continuing Vocational Education and Training

Since on a European level work-based CVET is not sufficiently regulated by laws or policies, the project partners decided to analyze their countries' policies and laws related to work-based CVET.

2.2.2. PARTNER POLICIES

In some of the countries involved in the project, vocational training is nowadays governed by Vocational Training Laws, as well as by Vocational Qualifications Laws and Labor Codes, either on national level, or by Decrees and Agreements specific to certain regions and/or autonomous communities. Most of the countries that the project is representing are governed by laws at state level, with differences between public and private management in some cases.

WORK-BASED LEARNING (WBL) – STATE OF PLAY

	WHERE ARE THE RULES WRITTEN?	WHO IS MANAGING THE POLICY? (LOCALLY, REGIONALLY, NATIONALLY)
AUSTRIA	**Regulations about WBL** can be found in the **Vocational Training Act** (the legal basis for the vocational training of apprentices), in **federal laws to regulate specific professions**, in **collective agreements** to regulate sector-specific aspects, in the **Federal Guideline for the Funding of Socio-Economic Enterprises** or the **Federal Guideline on Education and Training Grants**.	**Nationally**, the policy is managed by the **Ministry of Labour**, the **Ministry of Social Affairs, Health, Care and Consumer Protection** and the **Ministry of Education, Science and Research**. **Regionally**, the policy is managed by the nine **provinces** (Länder). The **Austrian economic and social partnership**, a system of economic and social policy cooperation between the interest groups of employers and employees, also plays an **important role on national level**.
BELGIUM	In Belgium the region is in charge of employement and the communities manage the education and therefore co-represent the work based learning. Example of Brussels-Wallonia Community: https://wallex.wallonie.be/sites/wallex/contents/acts/7/7477/1.html	In Belgium the region is in charge of employement and the communities manage the education and therefore co-represent the work based learning. There are also policy agreements on smaller scales .
FRANCE	In the labor Code	It's managed nationally
SLOVENIA	The National Professional Qualifications Act regulates conditions and procedures for the acquisition of national vocational qualifications.	All policies are state-run and administered by the Slovenian government.The basic legislation in this area applies to all employers in Slovenia. There are some differences between the public and private sectors.
SPAIN	In April 2022 a law was approved to reorganise and build an unique CVET system. 4 years to restructure all the aspects contained in the law is organized in two sub-systems: - Academic CVET, which provides qualifications from the education system. - CVET for employment, which awards certificates of professionalism and accreditations. Both systems share a reference catalog of professional qualifications that establishes homologations and equivalences between them. There are : - Laws regulating the structure and functioning of CVET. - Royal Decrees that regulate different aspects of CVET, qualifications and existing certificates of professionalism (Spanish State). - Decrees and orders (regional level) detailing certain aspects of implementation in each territory. - There are certain laws on lifelong learning that regulate certain aspects of CVET.	Nationally, the State Government regulates the principal structure of CVET. The regional governments have the competence of enforcing laws in their own territory (they has a partial competence, respecting a common framework, to regulate the CVET). They also have the competence to manage the resources (physical and human) to develop and run the actions of CVET The local administrations have only complementary competences to aid in some particular aspects (f. ex. giving some subsidies to particular people in risk of exclusion). It exists different agents involved in the CVET. The public administration has its own centres and personnel, but also exist private centers with its own personnel that has agreements with the public administration and obtains a part of financial resources from public funds.

Table 10 : Legal aspects regarding Work-Based Learning in each partner country

In order to analyse the policies in the five countries involved in the project (Austria, Belgium, France, Slovenia and Spain), we used the method established by Cedefop to categorise countries' policies on work-based CVET.

Table 11 : Classification of WBL policies in CVET in each partner country

The countries policies involved in the "Soft Skills 2.0" project all responds to the 5 criteria and therefore have conducive policies regarding WBL.

Conducive policies acknowledge WBL as a regular, common and accepted method for CVET and give room to specifically WBL-oriented programs. These policies finance training and learning that contains work-based elements. They recognise learning and knowledge, skills and competencies acquired through work-based training. They provide a context in which stakeholders take an interest in WBL, focus on it, promote it, facilitate it and support it.

The context is therefore favorable for the implementation of Soft Skills Work-Based Learning in the five partner countries the project represents.

2.3 A European Work-Based Learning process

More than an acknowledged training method, WBL is framed by a law in France that clearly defines what Work-Based Learning is and the steps it must follow to be recognized as such.

Article D. 6313-3-2 of the French Labor Code defines a training program as a course of study designed to achieve a professional objective. (...) The implementation of a training action in a work situation must include:

▪ The analysis of the work activity in order to adapt it for pedagogical purposes, if necessary;

▪ The prior designation of a trainer who can exercise a tutorial function;

• The setting up of reflective phases, distinct from the work situations and intended to use the lessons learned from the work situation for pedagogical purposes, which make it possible to observe and analyse the differences between the expectations, the achievements and the knowledge gained from each work situation in order to consolidate and explain the learning;

• Specific evaluations of the training achievements that mark or conclude the action;

As this is the country of the partnership that provides the most framework elements in its legislation, we decided to use the French Work-Based Learning model as a base for our European WBL process. The latter is composed of three main steps: the activity analysis, the preparatory sequence and the learning action:
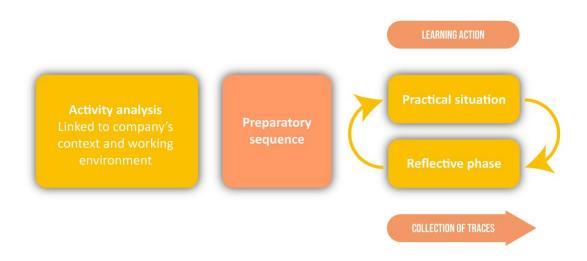

Table 12 : European Work-Based Learning process

2.3.1. ACTIVITY ANALYSIS

A prerequisite for Work-Based Learning is to be able to **analyse a specific job** in relation to the particular **context** of the identified company and the **work environment**.

This stage is carried out with people who know the job in question and who work directly in the company where the training action will take place.

To do this, it is important to start from a well-identified **ECVET job reference framework** (occupational standard) and to evaluate the degree of professional skills required for each competency.

2.3.2. PREPARATORY SEQUENCE

A work situation is not a learning situation.

The learning only happens when:

- It is **set up** so that there are things that allow the working learner to apply skills.

- **Challenges** are set up to enable the supervisors to see how the working learners react

For that reason, it is therefore necessary to **prepare** the WBL beforehand.

Going step by step is crucial and requires 3 main stages to be done:

- **Identify the work situations:** choose the main mission/activity and more specifically the skills targeted;

- Define the **training objectives:** the goals of the simulation and the link with the general knowledge provided in classroom training, for example;

- **Prepare the work situation:** organise all the logistics necessary for the setting up of the work situation and the arrangements that will be necessary/the problem situations to be generated during the work situation

2.3.3. PRACTICAL SITUATION & REFLECTIVE PHASES

In WBL, the learning action is a **cascade** of practical situations and reflective phases in a loop. The situation proposed will naturally depend on what was defined in the preparatory phase. The practical situation should **not be altered** by too many changes so it stays true to the real work-environment and situation. The pace of work is not the usual one, working learners need more time to practice.

Once the working learner has finished the practical situation, we move on to **the reflective phase**.

This phase enables the working learner to **create meaning** by reflecting independently on what happened during the simulation.

To do this, working learners will **describe** what they did, **analyse** their reactions, try to find **solutions** to the problems they encountered and finally see how they could **transfer** the solution and the use of skills to other professional situations.

The trainer can help to verbalise certain things if the working learner has difficulties but other than that the trainer should not intervene and remain stoic.

As long as the working learner is not able to formulate solutions and ideas for transferring what he/she has done to other work situations, the trainer should **offer other slightly modified practical situations**.

CAUTION: the trainer is not allowed to give the solutions and transfer ideas to the working learner. The aim is that the working learner learn on its own and comes up with solutions instinctively or by drawing on his/her past experiences and observations.

Studying the legal aspects of the 5 European countries represented by the project has allowed us to agree on a European Work-Based Learning process that can be used by all of them. Our challenge now is to provide a method and tools to be able to train Soft Skills in a Work-Based Learning context. These tools and its related method are presented in our "Work-Based Learning method" which you can find on our website: www.softskills-project.eu

A new approach

Soft Skills are at the heart of the well-being and the longevity of employees in the company. Soft Skills enable in particular the resolution of problems, stress management, a sense of cohesion, the management of emotions, communication and creativity, empathy, trust and a good time within the company.

Identifying the situations in which working learners still need to develop some skills or highlight others will allow them to find their strengths and further evolve in developing Soft Skills. The development of these skills will have an impact not only on the employee but also on the collective and the company.

Nowadays, more and more companies are looking for tools allowing the integration of Soft Skills in various corporate processes. Additionally, the demand for Soft Skills specific training, especially Work-Based Learning is rising all over Europe. The interviews we conducted with companies from various sectors in all our partner countries also made this clear. Offering training in the workplace and giving trainers/tutors/recruiters and HR staff the means to integrate Soft Skills into their work habits seems to be complementary and necessary.

Based on the information we collected for the production of this guide, the project has created tools for both the integration of Soft Skills in work-based CVET and the human resources management process. The tools created will make it possible to develop the visibility of Soft Skills through work placements, job search and job retention. With these tools, we wish to create a Soft Skills corporate culture for HR staff, trainers, tutors, etc. in recruitment as well as management. Additionally, we want the tools to be accessible to people with low qualifications and/or with disabilities through Work-Based Learning.

"The best way to learn anything else is to be in the field." - Habbaz Anouar

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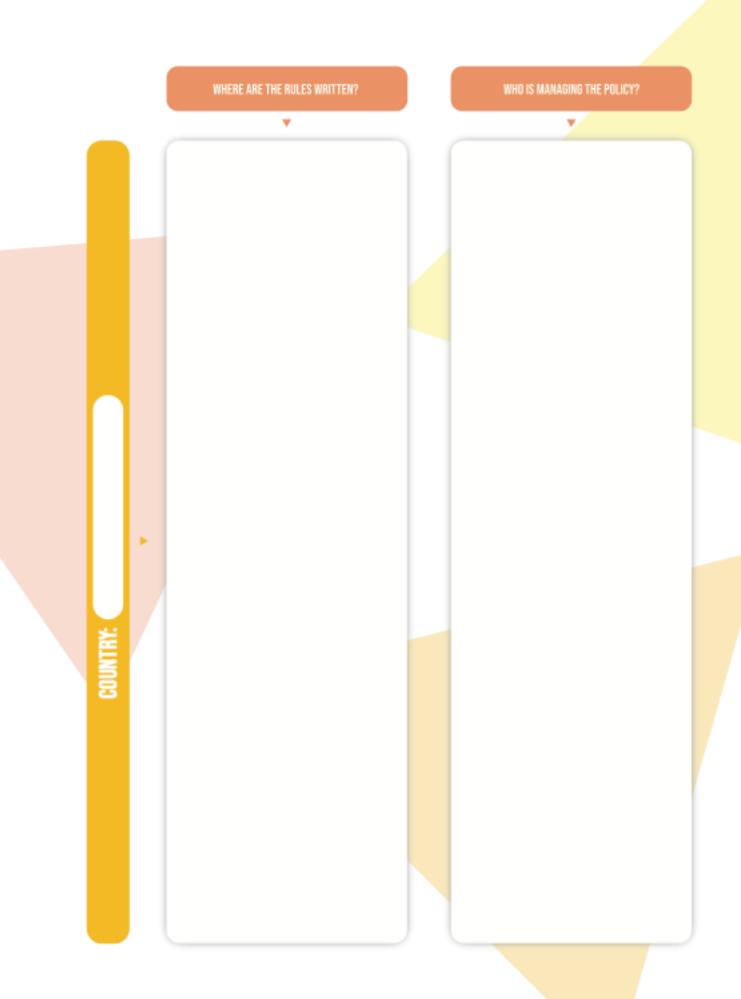
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ANNEXES

LEGAL ASPECTS REGARDING HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

COUNTRY:

WHERE ARE THE RULES WRITTEN?

WHO IS MANAGING THE POLICY?

Soft skills

GROWTH MINDSET

ADAPTABILITY
ADAPTING TO CHANGE

Ability to integrate changes to adapt to people and the environment, in a positive way.

AUTONOMY
DOING TASKS WITHOUT ANY HELP FROM OTHER PEOPLE

Ability to be independent, think by yourself, make decisions and undertake actions by yourself, within the framework and limits set by the work position.

ACCEPTING PROFESSIONAL REMARKS
ACCEPTING REMARKS

Ability to accept remarks and take them into account to improve your job.

LEARNING TO LEARN
LEARNING FROM YOUR OWN SUCCESSES AND FAILURES

Ability and desire to continuously acquire and update knowledge and competences.

SELF AWARENESS

PRESENTATION
TAKING CARE OF YOUR APPEARANCE

Ability to adapt your image and your appearance to your position.

SELF-CONFIDENCE
BELIEVING IN YOURSELF

Ability to appreciate your personal qualities and resources, which builds a sense of confidence.

EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE
CONTROL YOUR EMOTIONS

Ability to use the emotional information to identify the appropriate way to manage your emotions, depending on the situation.

SELF-REFLECTION
UNDERSTAND YOUR OWN FEELINGS AND BEHAVIOURS

Ability to put things into perspective to think about your own feelings and behaviours

COMMITMENT

SENSE OF ORGANISATION
STRUCTURING YOUR WORK IN A METHODICAL WAY

Ability to plan, prepare, prioritise and coordinate the tasks to be performed with a global vision of the situation

TAKING INITIATIVE
TAKING ACTION BY YOURSELF

Ability to offer, take action or imagine new solutions to carry out or improve your job, according to the rules of the workplace.

SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY
BEING AWARE OF YOUR DUTIES

Ability to take responsibility for the consequences of your decisions and actions, to feel responsible for the missions entrusted to you. ICATIO

ABILITY TO ANTICIPATE
GETTING PREPARED BEFORE ACTING

Ability to look to the future, to work with perseverance and to prepare according to your needs.

RELIABILITY

RESPECT OF THE RULES
RESPECTING THE RULES

Ability to respect the rules related to the context in which the activity is being developed.

SENSE OF ETHICS
BEING TRUE TO THE VALUES OF YOUR JOB

Ability to act according to the values of the job, to adopt a deontological attitude towards given situations.

EFFICIENCY
REACHING YOUR OBJECTIVES ON TIME

Ability to deliver expected results and objectives on time.

CONSCIENTIOUSNESS AT WORK
BEHAVE APPROPRIATELY

Ability and willingness to adopt the appropriate behaviour in the workplace and to make the necessary efforts to achieve goals.

INTERACTIONS

COMMUNICATION
KNOW HOW TO EXPRESS YOURSELF

Ability to express yourself clearly and effectively – to know how to structure your ideas, adapt vocabulary and message to the person you are speaking to.

ASSERTIVENESS
EXPRESSING YOURSELF WITH CONFIDENCE

Ability to express with confidence your feelings and assert your rights, while respecting the feelings and rights of others.

LEADERSHIP
LEADING A GROUP IN A CHOSEN DIRECTION

Ability to influence and bring together a group in order to achieve a common goal, in a relationship of mutual trust and without exceeding your authority.

TEAM WORK
COLLABORATING WITH OTHERS

Ability to undertake missions together in mutual respect to achieve common goals.

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