



Professional reconversion to ensure a better professional future

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Introduction



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Information

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The European Union is currently facing the **challenge of seizing the opportunities offered by the new wave of innovation**, while ensuring the participation of all its citizens in the benefits derived from it. However, the ability to benefit from innovation depends on access to relevant skills, which is one of the main determinants of competitiveness. According to the European Commission (2020), “the fundamental link between innovation, skills and growth makes investment in skills and proactive skills policies, aligned to the evolving industrial and technological landscape, a prerequisite for a dynamic and inclusive society”.

Technological innovations but also the demographic shifts, the environmental and climate change, and globalisation, are **drivers for transformative changes in the world of work**, having profound impacts both for employers and employees. As the International Labour Organization (2021) points out, “today’s skills will not match the jobs of tomorrow and newly acquired skills will quickly become obsolete. Many jobs will disappear and new jobs will be created as countries are transformed by these global drivers, generating countless opportunities. As the world of work undergoes an unprecedented transformation, countries are confronted with the challenge of an increasing mismatch between skills and jobs”.

Labour force and skills shortages have been a challenge for companies for many years, but the COVID-19 pandemic crisis has accentuated this phenomenon. Before the pandemic, 40% of European employers reported difficulty in finding people with the right skills (European Commission, 2020); by 2021, almost 70% of employers reported problems in hiring and perceived it as a major issue. At the same time, many employees feel they work in jobs that do not match their talents. These **skills gaps and mismatches** are a result of people’s educational and training choices not sufficiently aligned with the labour market needs, according to the main European social partner organisations. Even in some countries, high unemployment has been coexisting for years with high vacancy rates (BusinessEurope, 2022).

In this changing working and societal environment, **transferable skills** (alongside technical skills and academic knowledge) **are increasingly recognised as critical to success**. After all, technology is unlikely to replace workers whose jobs require creativity and complex social interactions. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2019) observes, “as trends such as globalisation and advances in artificial intelligence change the demands of the labour market and the skills needed for workers to succeed, people need to rely even more on their uniquely (so far) human capacity for creativity, responsibility and the ability to learn to learn throughout their life”.

There is no standard **terminology** for what is referred to as transferable skills. Alternative terms include soft skills, life skills, core skills, employability skills, core competences, portable competences, and others. The International Labour Organization (2021) defines them as “a set of non-technical skills (...) transferable across occupations and professions, as well as between low- and high-level jobs”. Therefore, transferable skills are abilities and qualities that can be applied across different companies, industries, and settings. They are skills that can be acquired and developed in one context but can be transferred to another context.

Transferable skills can be categorised in many ways, but international organisations usually distinguish between **social and emotional skills, and cognitive skills**. According to the International Labour Organization (2021), social and emotional skills refer to one's "abilities to regulate one's thoughts, emotions and behaviour", being "congruent with the setting, environment and society in which an individual lives. They are fundamental to effective social interaction at work and have an important role to play in the learning process". Cognitive skills refer to the "brain's ability to process new information, understand, remember and use it. By developing cognitive skills, an individual can better manage the process of analysing new information and apply it to other contexts more quickly and efficiently".

Anyway, there is evidence that these categories of transferable skills are not separate, but deeply interrelated. As the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (2018) points out, both socio-emotional skills and cognitive skills "require the capacity to consider the consequences of one's actions, evaluate risk and reward, and accept accountability for the products of one's work. This suggests moral and intellectual maturity, with which a person reflects upon and evaluates his or her actions in light of his or her experiences, personal and societal goals, what he or she has been taught and told, and what is right or wrong".

In today's world, **transferable skills are highly valued by employers** because they demonstrate that a candidate has a broad range of abilities and can apply them in different contexts. Transferable skills are particularly important in a rapidly changing job market, where employees are expected to be versatile and able to adapt to different situations. Additionally, transferable skills are not just beneficial for getting a job; they are also critical for career development. Workers who possess these skills are more likely to be promoted to leadership positions or to transition into new roles within the same organisation or in a different one. According to the World Economic Forum (2021), developing transferable skills "would bring extra benefits by preparing people to not only meet the skills that are in demand today but also those that will be in demand in the future".

On this basis, the project "Convert your future" aims to provide qualitative educational methodologies, approaches and resources to adult educators in order to improve the teaching and learning process of adult learners, especially the ones with fewer opportunities, fostering inclusion and development of the 21st century skills needed to (re)adapt and (re)integrate into the fast changing labour market.

Specifically, the **objectives of the project** are:

- To create educational resources in order to support adult educators and adult educational centres in their work of training, guiding and counselling adult learners in employment matters.
- To equip adult educators with the needed knowledge regarding the current changes of the labour market and the competences and tools to help adult learners to increase their employability.
- To upskill adult learners (especially low-skilled, NEETs, with difficulties to integrate or reintegrate in the labour market), in order to foster their professional reconversion and insertion in the labour market.

The main **outputs of the project** are:

- An online course named “Skills for Professional Conversion”, with a dynamic blend of e-books, video lessons, presentations and a self-assessment tool.
- A booklet with a collection of activities to empower educators and learners through practical methods, aimed at teaching and learning transferable skills.
- A document with guidelines on how to design and implement hands-on learning activities in adult education and how to create hands-on learning materials out of recycled resources.

This course contains **8 modules**, each addressing one of the most important transferable skills needed for professional conversion:

- Adaptability and resilience: the ability to respond to changes and react to adversity by finding solutions, even in times of crisis.
- Critical Thinking: the ability to analyse facts and form a judgement. It is a form of emotional intelligence.
- Initiative: the ability to be resourceful and work without always being told what to do.
- Creativity and Innovation: the ability to generate ideas that create value and improve processes.
- Leadership: the ability to guide and influence individuals or a group of people towards achieving a common goal.
- Emotional Intelligence: the ability to assess, understand, process and manage the emotional states of the people.
- Communication: the ability to convey information for greater understanding.
- Teamwork and Collaboration: the ability to work as a part of a team, in order to achieve a shared goal.

The focus on these skills was decided after a previous research and need analysis performed by the partners in their network of enterprises, using a sample of 35 organisations; concluding that these are the most relevant transferable skills for workers to succeed.

The following modules offer information on the importance of the skills in the current labour market, providing clear examples on situations in which the skills are needed in different fields. Particularly, each module addresses the following topics:

- Information on the skill.
- Teaching approaches to the skill.
- Good practices / applications in adult education related to the skill.

Through the different activities, this course intends to offer a general overview of the labour market, in terms of current changes, requirements and direction in which the economic landscape leans towards; and, ultimately, helping citizens to make free and efficient decisions concerning their training and/or professional conversion.

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