Feasibility and Impact Guide on Methods and Tools for the Evaluation and Validation of Competences

Executive Summary

The *DICE Feasibility and Impact Guide* is the third and final intellectual output (IO3) of the project. It has been designed to inform professionals working in various fields with Third Country Nationals (TCNs) and mainly newcomers (migrants, asylum seekers, and refugees) on the importance of evaluation and validation of their beneficiaries' competences and especially of their soft skills which can facilitate integration as well as to provide them with methods and tools for evaluating and validating such competences, useful information on their utilisation, and conclusions on their effectiveness. These *methods/tools* are: 1. the *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards for Potential Analysis*, 2. the *LEVEL5 Validation System based on the VIC Approach*, and 3. the *EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals* and have been selected by the DICE partnership for their relevance with the objectives of DICE and their effectiveness, differentiation, and complementarity.

The content of this Guide will benefit *both professionals and newcomers*: professionals will add new methods to their toolkit for supporting their beneficiaries in an innovative and effective way and newcomers will improve their reflecting skills and self-awareness and will be provided with evaluation reports on their competences that will be useful for working on their weaknesses and for pointing out their strengths and existing competences when striving for finding a job and their social inclusion.

In order to determine the feasibility of the selected methods/tools and the impact they could have on the daily practice of professionals and their beneficiaries, *local laboratories* have been organised and implemented in the countries of the partnership for *presenting* them to professionals and *training* them on their use as well as for *pilot testing* them with newcomers.

The Guide is divided in *two parts*: a theoretical analysis of the topic of evaluation and validation of competences and the three selected evaluation and validation methods/tools (Part A) and a part analysing the results of the local laboratories for presenting and pilot testing the methods/tools along with conclusions on their feasibility, strong and weak points, effectiveness, and impact (Part B). More specifically, each part of the Guide covers the following topics:

PART A: Theoretical Background
1. **Importance of Evaluation and Validation of Competences**
    1.1 What "Evaluation" and "Validation" are
    1.2 Importance of Evaluation and Validation of Competences
    1.3 Next Step: Certification of Competences
2. **Competences' Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools Used by DICE**
    2.1 Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards for Potential Analysis
    2.2 LEVEL5 Validation System based on the VIC Approach
    2.3 EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals

3. **Certification of Personal Competences: ISO/IEC 17024**
4. **Methodology for Introducing the Methods/Tools Used by DICE and Evaluating their Effectiveness**
5. **Tips and Advice for Implementing Local Laboratories to Pilot Test the Methods/Tools**

PART B: Results from the National/Local Laboratories on Competences' Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools

1. **Overview of Results from All National/Local Laboratories**
2. **Presentation and Analysis of National/Local Laboratories' Results by Country**

    2.1 Local Laboratory: France (*Partner responsible: Eurocircle*)
      a. Local Context and Way of Laboratory Implementation
      b. Selected Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools and Reasons for Selection
      c. Analysis of Questionnaires by Professionals and Newcomers
      d. Recommendations from Professionals and the French Partner/Conclusions

    2.2 Local Laboratory: Italy (*Partner responsible: CESIE*)
      a. Local Context and Way of Laboratory Implementation
      b. Selected Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools and Reasons for Selection
      c. Analysis of Questionnaires by Professionals and Newcomers
      d. Recommendations from Professionals and the Italian Partner/Conclusions

    2.3 Local Laboratory: Cyprus (*Partner responsible: MMC*)
      a. Local Context and Way of Laboratory Implementation
      b. Selected Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools and Reasons for Selection
      c. Analysis of Questionnaires by Professionals and Newcomers
      d. Recommendations from Professionals and the Cypriot Partner/Conclusions

    2.4 Local Laboratory: Poland (*Partner responsible: Danmar Computers*)
      a. Local Context and Way of Laboratory Implementation
      b. Selected Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools and Reasons for Selection
      c. Analysis of Questionnaires by Professionals and Newcomers
      d. Recommendations from Professionals and the Polish Partner/Conclusions

3. **Strong and Weak Points of the Three Competences' Evaluation and Validation Methods/Tools**
4. **Potential Impact of DICE**

    4.1 General Conclusions
    4.2 Area for Further Work

The Guide includes also an **Introduction,** a **Table of Contents** and a **Table of Figures,** and the **Bibliography** used.

The main topics discussed and analysed in the Guide are the following:

Importance of Evaluating and Validating Competences

"Validation" could be defined as "a process which involves a structured assessment, evaluation, documentation, and recognition of knowledge and competences possessed by a person independently of how it is acquired" and as "the act of making something officially or legally acceptable or approved". This definition implies that validation refers to a process in which evaluation is included and that evaluation precedes validation as one of the initial stages of validating a competence.

"Evaluation" thus, is "the process of judging or calculating the quality, importance, amount, or value of something".

Individuals who have acquired skills and competences through all forms of learning need to be in a position to demonstrate and prove what they have learnt, especially when it comes to non-formal and informal learning processes. This is significant for further self-awareness and individual development of newcomers too, whose level of integration in their new societies is minimum as well as a useful tool in the hands of professionals working with them. The identification and evaluation of the competences of these people can add value to their overall profile through enriching their CVs and assisting them in job and other interviews. As for professionals, through profiling newcomers and help them realise who they are, what they know, what they can do, and what they should improve, their work becomes easier and more effective.

Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards for Potential Analysis – LEVEL5 Validation System based on the VIC Approach – EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals

Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards for Potential Analysis were developed by the German foundation "Bertelsmann Stiftung" in order to assist in the recognition and utilisation of the potential of people with migrant backgrounds and more specifically, to improve the labour market integration of low skilled migrants. There are cards on the social, personal, and technical-methodological skills of the migrants as well as cards on their interests. The way they can be used are not standardised but extremely diverse with respect to the thematic breadth and depth of the counselling (e.g. for general mapping of competences or for identifying competences necessary for a specific job), but the objective is always the same: to explicitly record the migrant's strengths through a "positive list" of competence cards which are placed in front of him/her, with things that s/he can do, instead of a "negative list", with things that s/he cannot do. The determinated competences can be documented for further counselling purposes and the relevant document can be given to the migrant.

LEVEL5 Validation System based on the European project VIC's approach is a long-term validation system for soft skills which is specifically designed to evaluate and validate personal, social, and organisational development of competences in non-formal and informal learning settings. It is structured on a three-dimensional model which maps the development of: knowledge (cognition/mind), skills (actions/hands), and attitudes (emotions and values/heart) regarding a competence. Also, it is based on 5 learning levels, from beginner to competent expert. This model forms the basis for the core LEVEL5 instruments: the "LEVEL5 Cube" that visualises a person's competence development in a specific (preferably practical) learning field, which is described in a so called "LEVEL5 reference system" that facilitates the design and planning of non-formal/informal learning and the validation of competences in a specific, practical action and learning field.

EU Skills Profile Tool for Third Country Nationals was developed by the European Commission as part of the "Skills Agenda for Europe" (2017), in order to support early profiling of TCNs living in the EU. It is an online tool which "helps to map the skills, qualifications, and work experiences of the TCNs

and to give them personalised advice on further steps, e.g. a referral to recognition of diplomas, skills' validation, further training, or employment support services" through a detailed report produced by answering the questions in the different sections of the tool.

Local Laboratories for Pilot Testing the Methods/Tools

For presenting and simulating the use of the selected methods and tools, partners have organised pilot tests in the form of face to face or online local laboratories, with separate presentation of the methods/tools to professionals (social workers, psychologists, educators, mentors, integration programmes' officers etc.) and testing of them with newcomers.

In France, Eurocircle conducted a face to face local laboratory in two sessions, one with both target groups and one with the participation of professionals only, presenting all three methods/tools and pilot testing Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards. In Italy, CESIE conducted its whole local laboratory online, by implementing one online session with professionals only, where Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards and LEVEL5 Validation System were presented, and by pilot testing both methods/tools in separate sessions with newcomers (one online with pilot testing of LEVEL5 Validation System and two face to face with pilot testing of Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards). In Cyprus, MMC implemented one online session with professionals and one face to face with newcomers. Professionals were introduced to all three methods/tools with more of a focus on Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards and EU Skills Profile Tool, which were both tested with newcomers. In Poland, Danmar Computers implemented one face to face session only, where LEVEL5 Validation System and EU Skills Profile Tool were presented to professionals, who also tested the latter by themselves.

The results of all implemented laboratories have been strongly positive and satisfying for both professionals and newcomers. They all underlined the usefulness of the selected methods and tools either for becoming more effective in their daily practice through profiling the competences, strengths, and weaknesses of newcomers (professionals) or for identifying their own strengths, revealing hidden competences, and realising weaknesses to get improved towards social inclusion (newcomers). From all laboratories, it became evident that the evaluation and validation of competences and especially of soft skills – which are not so often taken into consideration when profiling an individual – are of high importance when trying to understand and improve yourself in order to be integrated to the labour market and society. At the same time, it has been shown that there is high potential for these methods/tools to be transferred to other groups as well. As for the possibility of certification of the evaluated and validated competences, opinions differed, with the majority of professionals being positive towards such perspective, underlining the significance and usefulness of soft skills nowadays as well as of being in a position to prove them in CVs or before employers.

Recommendations on the Use of the Methods/Tools

Based on the results of all local laboratories, where the three methods/tools were presented, analysed, discussed, and tested, professionals and partners have come to the following aggregate conclusions in the form of recommendations:

1. They can all be used both on personal and on professional levels.

2. They can all be used for preparing (different kinds of) reports on competences, suitable as attachments to CVs or to assist newcomers in getting ready for job and other interviews, which are both very important for them.

3. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* are ideal for face to face group sessions, *LEVEL5 Validation System* could be used either face to face or online in group or one-to-one sessions, and *EU Skills Profile Tool* should be selected in one-to-one face to face sessions but also online due to its digital nature.

4. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* should be selected when working with groups unexperienced in competences' evaluation (having difficulty in identifying their own strengths and skills) due to its intuitive, practical, and visual nature, resembling to a game and creating a pleasant and interactive learning environment, *LEVEL 5 Validation System* should be used with groups or individuals advanced in competences' evaluation, since it is more complex, allowing for profound reflection processes, and *EU Skills Profile Tool* should be used when individual, comprehensive competences' recording is needed, since a detailed evaluation report is produced at the end of the process.

5. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* could be used as a descriptive starting point on how to guide the reflection process on soft skills, hidden competences, and the competences' topic in general (also as an introduction within a larger learning process), *LEVEL 5 Validation System* when thorough discussions on three dimensions of soft skills are intended, and *EU Skills Profile Tool* when recommendations and advice based on a broad spectrum of both soft and hard competences are considered helpful, since particular sections of the produced report are dedicated to such directions by the facilitator.

6. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* could be used multiple times with the same group, each time getting deeper in the understanding, identification, and evaluation of competences.

7. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* could be used even with groups that do not speak the local language up to a high level since they are written in basic language and are available in multiple languages. The same applies for *EU Skills Profile Tool*, which could also be used with individuals who do not speak the local language at all, since it is available in almost all EU languages and some others, with the possibility of simultaneous screening of two languages (the one preferred by the user and another preferred by the facilitator) while using it. *LEVEL5 Validation System* demands a higher level in local language since it entails more deep discussions but it is also available in multiple languages (fewer than those of the Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards).

8. In *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards*, concrete examples, clarifications on provided definitions and images/symbols, and corrections in translation/supplementary translation may be required to address inaccuracies and bridge cultural and other differences.

9. In *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards*, competences relevant to the desired evaluation goal should be pre-selected out of the exhaustive provided list of competence cards, so as for the process to be tailor-made to the target group's profile and hence, more effective.

10. *Bertelsmann Stiftung Competence Cards* and *LEVEL5 Validation System* should every time be adapted to the target group's needs and existing competences (e.g. high level of local language and relevant reflection v. local language barrier and need to approach the topic interactively, auto-evaluation ability v. need for guidance, feeling more comfortable when in group with peers v. when reflecting on competences alone).

11. *LEVEL5 Validation System* could be simplified for use with beginners too, through interactive activities and work in groups.

12. *EU Skills Profile Tool* could be used along with other EU profiling and documentation tools, such as the Europass templates, so as for more comprehensive documentation of individuals' profiles.

13. Possibility of certification: The use of all should be followed by certification of the evaluated/validated competences (mainly of soft skills since the hard skills evaluated by *EU Skills Profile Tool* are most of the times certified in other ways), since such certification would add value to individuals' overall profile, covering various stages of their lives (rather than simply counting degrees) and corresponding to challenges they face daily. Soft skills are becoming more and more important nowadays and especially in today's labour markets, where employers tend to evaluate them in job interviews or in specific tests. The certification would allow for unification and better structuring of the process, more fair evaluations/validations, and would be a different tool for newcomers to prove and not just present their strengths and work on competences. (Some professionals were reserved – but not negative – to this perspective, justifying their position with three arguments: such skills are basic and certification seems not necessary; such skills are not easily evaluated (and consequently certified) since their level of acquisition is more or less subjective; and a negative evaluation (not allowing for certification) might be discouraging for the assessed individual in the future).

Area for Further Work

The overall work in the framework of DICE offers useful and often innovative insights in the so contemporary and challenging issues of diversity, inclusion, citizenship, and empowerment and can definitely contribute to improving both the services provided to newcomers by professionals in the field and to supporting directly these people in their difficult path to social inclusion. Despite all this work, this is an area of constantly rising needs and of challenges coming up every day. This Guide could be used as an introductory, starting point to further analysis of the presented methods and for research for other relevant tools, which could be added to this primary list and to professionals' existing toolkits, while also being combined with the training material developed by the DICE partnership in the form of e-courses and with other available material on the same thematic area, so as to support professionals and their beneficiaries in a comprehensive and essentially effective way.