



RECOGNITION, VALIDATION AND CERTIFICATION OF SOFT SKILLS

AG3 – Labour market, education and training

Shaping future together

The following Policy Recommendations have been elaborated by the members of the Actions Groups of EUSALP, reflect the expertise of the AGs members and are meant for voluntary implementation by the decision makers when it comes to the Alpine Region.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Soft skills are increasingly seen as essential to be effective at work, but remain difficult to define, assess, and certify. The lack of a common European framework hinders their recognition and integration into education and employment pathways.

Action Group 3 (AG 3) seeks to contribute to the creation of a common Alpine framework for the observation, assessment, and validation of soft skills. A dedicated toolset was developed and successfully piloted in Austria, Italy, and Slovenia, demonstrating its potential for broader application.

Based on the knowledge and experience gained through AG 3 work it is recommended to:

1. **Develop a unified classification system** for soft skills, regularly updated and applicable at all governance levels.
2. **Create an open repository** of soft skills identification, assessment and validation practices and tools to support knowledge sharing and continuous improvement.
3. **Raise awareness and provide incentives** for soft skills development and recognition.
4. **Integrate soft skills into education and lifelong learning policies** through supportive legislation.
5. **Launch a EUSALP-wide pilot initiative** to scale the toolset, train educators and Human Resources professionals, and promote cross-border mobility.

The initiative supports regional cohesion by enhancing the mutual recognition of soft skills, improving workforce mobility, and aligning educational outcomes with labour market needs. It also contributes to EU-wide goals on skills recognition and lifelong learning.

INTRODUCTION

Challenge to be tackled

Soft skills are increasingly valued in the workplace in combination with technical skills and credentials since they determine *how* people can fulfil their tasks and contribute to building a positive and productive work environment. However, soft skills are, not only, difficult-to-define competencies, but also difficult to measure, be taught or trained. Moreover, their development is a life-long and dynamic process that encompasses all aspects of life, professional and personal, and needs to be tackled from an early age. Despite their increasing relevance, there is a lack of consolidated and recognised reference frameworks for the classification, denomination, evaluation, and certification of soft skills at any macroregional-relevant level (regional, national and European).

Policy objective

AG 3 aims to fill the existing gaps and contribute to the elaboration of a common Alpine reference framework for observing, assessing and validating soft skills, which could serve as a pilot experience at European level. To this end, a toolset was developed in the Support EUSALP Project for three selected soft skills (communicating, creative thinking, collaborating in teamwork and networks) identified as crucial in the labour market and in a work-based learning context. This toolset was subjected to an on-field testing phase in three Alpine countries (Austria, Italy and Slovenia) and proved to facilitate the assessment of soft skills' possession. Vocational Education and Training (VET) providers are identified as crucial players, for their critical role in skill development – including soft ones – in response to the rapid transformation of EU labour market¹ (CEDEFOP 2025 chapter 5) and thanks to their links with perspective employers.

Territorial dimension

A broad adoption of this toolset has the potential to enhance mutual recognition of soft skills as well as facilitate and make more effective the mobility of students and future workers in the Alpine region and beyond. Once validated, soft skills could be integrated into resumes as credentials, and thus facilitate the recruitment of candidates with a proper combination of soft skills and technical expertise, which is a common challenge across Europe, including Alpine regions.

Existing Policy Framework and Need for Intervention

The results and objective achieved in AG 3 respond to the challenges pose by the Union of Skills, which compels to “better utilize the existing skills by improving the recognition of qualification across borders and acknowledging competencies gained outside formal education”² and are in line with the Council Recommendation of 22 May 2018 on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning. Moreover, this experience can contribute to the collection of practices foreseen in the context of the Italian Law n. 22 of 19 February 2025, which introduces the development of non-cognitive and transversal skills in the curricula of educational institutions and provincial adult education centres, as well as in vocational education and training programmes.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS (LIST)

P.R.1 Create a common soft skills classification system applicable at all relevant governance levels and subjected to periodical review for improvement.

¹ 2025 CEDEFOP, Shaping learning and skills for Europe: A time for commitment.

² Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions, The Union of Skills, COM (2025) 90 final, p. 4.

Alpine Space

P.R.2 Collect practices on soft skills in an open repository by capitalizing on existing experiences, initiatives and projects developed at all levels dealing with the identification, assessment and validation of soft skills to provide inspiration and share knowledge on available definitions, methodologies and tools, with the aim to improving them over time.

P.R.3 Raise awareness on the importance of soft skills and provide incentives for their recognition and enhancement.

P.R.4 Develop legislation on the inclusion of soft skills components in educational curricula and up-skilling and re-skilling courses.

P.R.5 Create an EUSALP pilot initiative on soft skills with the contribution of all relevant stakeholders and AGs encompassing several components: (1) capitalize on the AG 3 toolset for observing, assessing and validating soft skills to create courses/learning modules for teachers, Human Resources professionals, and tutors; (2) widen the number of soft skills considered in the toolset; (3) adopt the toolset in all relevant contexts (secondary education and VET systems, career guidance, employment agencies, etc.); (4) envision cross-border mobility of trained teachers, students and workers to act as multipliers of good practices.

Governance table

P.R.	European Union (EU Commission, EU Parliament, Council, specialised agencies, Managing Authorities)	National Level (Government, Parliament, competent ministries/specialised agencies)	Regional Level (competent authorities)	Local Level (e.g. relevant stakeholders, schools and VET providers, employment agencies)
1	(a) Review existing European soft skills-related frameworks (e.g. Entrecomp, Digcomp, Lifecomp, Greencomp) to better integrate them and standardise methodologies and formats used to describe identified skills. (b) Improve classification systems for soft skills – e.g. the European Skills, Competencies and Occupations Taxonomy, sub-pillar Transversal Skills (ESCO-t) – to agree on common naming and definitions and pave the way towards mutual recognition processes. (c) Launch calls for national/regional experts to achieve (a) and (b), and coordinate their contributions.	(a) Support the European effort by providing national experts that contribute to the reviewing and classification efforts based on Italian experiences and studies. (b) Coordinate inputs coming from the regional level.	Contribute to the European effort by providing feedback directly and/or through the national level on the basis of direct experiences, projects, and studies.	(a) Contribute to the regional efforts on the basis of direct experiences, projects, and studies. (b) Involve companies and VET providers on task forces for soft skills recognition and enhancement.
2	Through sectorial agencies launch calls for collecting pilot tools/methodologies for observing, assessing and validating soft skills.	Contribute to the collection of practices by providing experiences collected on the basis of the Italian Law n. 22 of 19 February 2025.	Contribute to the national effort by providing data on soft skills definitions, standards and tools developed in	Contribute to the regional and national level providing data from direct experiences, projects and studies.

Alpine Space

			dedicated projects and studies as well as based on the regional repository.	
3	(a) Enhance the soft skills component within the Union of Skills' deliverables. (b) Foresee resources for skills development linked to the social right pillar in the next Multiannual Financial Framework.	(a) Provide resources for soft skills training of teachers and public servants. (b) Introduce national incentives for soft skills recognition and enhancement at company level.	(a) Set up a regulatory framework and economic resources for training teachers, Human Resources professionals, and tutors on soft skills recognition and valorisation. (b) Introduce incentives for soft skills recognition and enhancement at company level.	Raise awareness on soft skills importance to stimulate private sector in investing in skill development.
4	Draft a legislative proposal on a common European framework for the automatic recognition of soft skills based on a European classification system for soft skills, ³ e.g. the ESCO framework, the multilingual classification of European Skills, Competences, and Occupations, and in particular the Transversal skills pillar.	Develop national legislation fostering the inclusion of soft skills in schools and VET curricula at all levels and up-skilling and re-skilling modules (e.g. for unemployed, NEET, and workers in job transition).	Depending on their competences, support/implement national legislation on soft skills inclusion in schools' curricula and training programmes.	Support/implement soft skills-related measures and obligations established at higher governance levels.
5	Support by DG REGIO in promoting the EUSALP pilot initiative at EU level and facilitate connections with DG EMPL and other competent Units.	(a) Consider the AG 3 soft skills toolset in thematic studies. (b) Support the diffusion and adoption of the AG 3 soft skills toolset in relevant contexts.	(a) Promote the participation in the pilot initiative and the adoption of the AG 3 soft skills toolset by relevant stakeholders (e.g. schools, VET providers, companies, etc.) (b) Provide additional financial resources for the pilot initiative and to widen the experimentation to other soft skills.	Participate in the pilot initiative and spin-off projects.

³ Inspired by the Union of Skills, *cit.*, p. 13.

IMPLEMENTATION

P.R.	Economic Impacts	Environmental Impacts	Social Impacts
1	(a) Improved recognition of soft skills in perspective workforce with positive consequences on market competitiveness. (b) Increased mobility of students and workers in the European educational space and job market.		(a) Processes for the mutual recognition of (soft) skills envisioned and enabled. (b) Enhanced recognition of competencies of non-EU citizens and their access to the job market.
2	Tools and methodologies for soft skills recognition, validation and activation enhanced.		
3	Companies interested in investing in (soft) skills development.	Green skills enhanced with an impact on environmentally friendly behaviours.	Opportunities of up-skilling and re-skilling for unemployed or workers in transition provided.
4	Stable legal framework for soft skills incentives provided.		Students and workers aware of their potential and able to activate soft skills.
5	Mobility of students and workers in the Alpine region enhanced. Improved matching between supply and demand of workforce.		Unemployment reduced thanks to a repositioning of workforce in the Alpine labour market.

CONTACT PERSON(S)

Elisabetta Sovilla, AG3 Leader, and AG3 Lead Support Team

Provincia Autonoma di Trento

eusalp.labourandeducation@provincia.tn.it