

## **STUDY ON THE NEEDS OF COMPETENCIES AND ABILITIES FOR THE GRADUATES' ADAPTATION TO THE REQUIREMENTS OF THE LABOUR MARKET IN THE CONTEXT OF EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The workforce competence is a core value for the development of a competitive, sustainable and innovative economy, in accordance with the objectives of Europe 2020. In times of budgetary constraints and unprecedented global competitive pressures, the European Union's policies on employment and competencies that contribute to the shaping of the transition to a green, intelligent and innovative economy has to be a priority. Romania's European Union accession is a major challenge for our country and implicitly for the Centre Region in terms of adapting the Romanian economic and social environment to the European one. Under this new context, the changes to ensure competitiveness will cause major changes in the field of employment and the workforce professional training. The development of the continuous vocational training system that would meet the requirements of the labour market and of a knowledge-based economy requires relevant information on the evolution of jobs and professions, the evolution tendencies of the labour market, the needs for competencies and qualifications of companies, the level of correlation between the demand and offer of workforce and the identification of gaps, the programmes' offer of professional training suppliers and its suitability to the needs of applicants. These are some of the reasons that have contributed to the accomplishment of the study on the needs of competencies and abilities for the graduates' adaptation to the requirements of the labour market in the context of Europe 2020 strategy.*

**KEY WORDS:** *key competencies; professional competencies; abilities.*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** *J24; I20; I25.*

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Europe 2020 is the European Union's strategy of economic growth for the next ten years. In a permanently changing world, the European Union wishes to become an intelligent, sustainable and favourable to inclusion economy. These three priorities are mutually supportive and able to help the EU and the member states to obtain a high level of employment, productivity and social cohesion. In practice, the Union has established five major objectives – regarding the employment, innovation, education, social inclusion and the environment/energy – that are about to be achieved until 2020. The member states have adopted their own national objectives in these areas. Various European and national actions come to support the Strategy.

Within the Europe 2020 Strategy, the European Union has approved a 75% employment objective for men and women for the age of 20-64 until 2020: an ambitious undertaking for the sustainability of the social European model, of the social welfare systems, economic growth and public finances. Moreover, the school dropout rate should be reduced under the level of 10% and at least 40% of the young generation should have a college diploma. (3.3.2010 COM (2010) 2020)

At the level of the Union, there have been established a series of actions to solve these problems for the substantially increase of employment, actions focused on four key priorities:

- *A better functioning of the labour markets.*
- *A more competent workforce*, able to contribute and adapt to the technological changes through new models of work organisation. This is an important challenge, given the rapidly changing competencies needed and the persistent disparities of competencies on the labour market.
- *A better quality of jobs and working conditions.*
- *Stronger policies to create jobs and workforce demand.* It is not enough to make sure that people remain active and acquire the necessary competencies to get a job: the economic recovery should be based on growth that generates employment.

## 2. ASPECTS REGARDING THE COMPETENCIES AND ABILITIES

In accordance with the Commission's Communication to the European Parliament, Council, the European economic and social Committee and the Committee of the Regions (COM (2010) 682/23.11.2010, Strasbourg), "*regardless of age, sex, socioeconomic context, ethnicity or disability, all EU citizens should have the opportunity to acquire and develop the range of knowledge, competencies and skills they need in order to be successful on the labour market*".

For this purpose, the education and training systems should provide the adequate range of competencies, including the digital and cross key competencies, mass-media and communication education in a foreign language. These should also provide the possession by young graduates of secondary and tertiary education of the competencies needed to achieve a rapid and successful transition towards getting a job. The fight against early school-leaving and the low educational results in basic skills

such as literacy, numerical and scientific skills, including for adults, is a core element for inclusion, employment and job development.

According to the Government's Ordinance no. 129/2000 on the adults' professional training, republished, the Official Gazette no. 711/2002, as amended, and to the Explanatory Dictionary of the Romanian language, **competence** is the person's ability to use and combine knowledge, skills and specific attitudes demonstrating personal and professional values to perform working activities at the specified quality standard. The **professional competence** is defined as the ability to perform the activities required at the workplace to the quality specified in the occupational standard. **Ability** refers to cleverness, ingenuity, capability, skill.

**Key competences** are defined as a combination between knowledge, skills and attitudes adequate to the context, being those necessary to all individuals for personal affirmation and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and employment.

The National Council for Adult Training approved, by Decision no. 86/24.06.2088, in compliance with the European Union's and the European Union Council's Recommendation on the key competencies lifelong learning (2006/962/EC), The List of key competencies, common to various professions, a list that includes:

a) *The ability to communicate in the official language*: it represents the ability to express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions in both oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) and to interact linguistically in a proper and creative manner in all cultural and social contexts: in education and professional training, at the work place, recreation and leisure.

b) *The ability to communicate in foreign languages*: it generally shares the main communication abilities in the official language: this is based on the ability to understand, express and interpret concepts, thoughts, feelings, facts and opinions both in an oral and written form (listening, speaking, reading and writing) in adequate social and cultural contexts (in education and professional training, at the work place, recreation and leisure), in terms of someone's wishes and needs. It requires skills such as mediation, intercultural understanding. An individual's advanced knowledge varies between the 4 dimensions (listening, speaking, reading, writing) and between different languages, in accordance with the social and cultural environment the individual comes from, the environment, his/her needs and/or interests.

c) *Basic skills in mathematics, science, technology*. *The mathematical competence* is the ability to develop and apply mathematical thinking with the purpose of solving a series of problems of daily situations. In the attempt to develop competencies regarding the work with basic mathematical elements, the focus should fall on the process itself, on the activity, as well as on knowledge. It involves, to various degrees, the ability and willingness to use types of mathematical thinking (logical and spatial thinking) and ways of presentation (formulas, models, constructions, graphs, charts). *The competence in science* refers to the ability and willingness to use a number of knowledge and methodologies with the purpose of explaining the natural world, identifying questions and drawing conclusions based on evidence. *The competence in technology* is regarded as an implementation of these knowledge and methodologies as an answer to human needs or desires.

d) *Computer skills*. They involve the critical and safe usage of the information society's technologies during office hours, free time and for communication. These are established through basic competencies in ICT: use of computer for recovery, evaluation, storage, production, presentation and exchange of information, communication and taking part in collaborative networks via internet.

e) *The ability to learn*: it represents the ability to pursue and persevere in learning, to organise your own learning, including through an effective management of time and information, both individually and in groups. This ability includes the awareness of self learning processes and needs, by identifying the available opportunities and the ability to overcome obstacles in order to learn successfully. It involves the acquisition, production and assimilation of new knowledge and skills, as well as the use of counselling.

f) *Social and civic competencies*. This category includes personal, interpersonal and intercultural competencies and all types of behaviours are covered in order to give the individual the opportunity to take part in a constructive and efficient manner to the social life and to the work field, and especially in the increasingly diversified companies, offering the possibility to solve conflicts, if necessary. Civic competencies properly equip the individual to actively participate to the civil life, based on the knowledge of social and political concepts and structures and on the commitment to a democratic and active participation.

g) *Entrepreneurial competencies*. These competencies refer to an individual's ability to put the ideas into practice: creativity, innovation, taking risks, as well as the ability to plan and manage projects with the purpose of achieving the objectives. This helps individuals not only in their daily lives, but also at work, making them aware of their work's context, making them able to take advantage of opportunities and it represents the foundation for more specific skills and knowledge required by those who establish or take part to a social or commercial activity. The competence should include the awareness of ethical values and should promote good governance.

h) *The cultural expression competence*: it represents the appreciation of the importance of creative expression of ideas, experiences and emotions, through a number of means, including music, artistic interpretation, literature, visual arts.

However, key competencies are the only ones that should be considered for employment. Besides these, there are a series of other competencies and general abilities that an employee should have. These, however, can be more or less important, depending on the employee's profession, the nature of work, the position held.

### 3. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

In order to identify the needs of competencies and abilities for the graduates' adaptation to the requirements of the labour market, a workshop on "Competencies, abilities and qualifications for the graduates' adaptation to the requirements of the labour market" was organised, where, together with other instruments, the "Questionnaire on the needs of competencies and abilities for the graduates' adaptation to the requirements of the labour market" was introduced. The workshop was attended by students, teachers, employers, representatives of some public organisations (County

School Inspectorates, county Agencies for Employment, County Youth and Sports Agencies, etc.), representatives of some non-profit organisations with responsibilities in education and youth activities. The workshops were held during 2011 in Sibiu, Cluj, Craiova and Timisoara. The distribution of respondents on counties is the following: Sibiu: 27 respondents; Cluj: 26 respondents; Craiova: 26 respondents; Timisoara: 27 respondents.

The results of the study will be used to organise the Career Caravan – training seminars and my Map for the journey on the labour market, within the SOP HRD contract “Career Caravan”.

### 3.1. Key (cross) competencies

The collected data on key (cross) competencies are presented in table 1. For a hierarchy of competencies, the score was calculated (from 1 – Not at all important to 5 – Very important) for each of them, on towns and then centralised (due to independent reasons – the space assigned to the papers – the calculations and graphs shall no longer be presented).

**Table 1. Key (cross) competencies**

Key (cross) competencies	Score Sibiu	Score Cluj	Score Craiova	Score Timișoara	General score
The ability to communicate in the official language	4.52	4.92	4.81	4.70	4.75
The ability to communicate in foreign languages	4.59	4.58	4.65	4.59	4.60
Basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology	3.78	3.65	3.73	3.74	3.73
Computer skills (IT usage)	4.48	4.31	4.58	4.48	4.46
The ability to learn	4.70	4.85	4.85	4.63	4.76
Social and civic competencies	4.11	4.00	4.23	3.81	4.04
Entrepreneurial competencies	4.00	4.08	3.96	4.26	4.08
The cultural expression competence	4.19	3.65	3.85	3.70	3.85

From the analysis of data processing on the four towns where the workshops were organised, we conclude that:

- In **Sibiu**, the highest score was calculated for *the ability to communicate in foreign languages* (4.59), followed at a small difference by *the ability to communicate in the official language* (score 4.52). The lowest importance is given to *the basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology* (score 3.78);
- In **Cluj**, the respondents stated that the most important key competencies necessary for the graduates' integration on the labour market are *the ability*

to communicate in the official language (score 4.98) and the ability to learn (score 4.85). The lowest level of score was for *the basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology* and for *the cultural expression competence*;

- A similar situation can be noticed in **Craiova**, a town where the most important key competencies are also considered to be *the ability to learn* (score 4.85) and *the ability to communicate in the official language* (score 4.81). The least important competence is *the basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology* (score 3.73).
- **Timișoara** has a similar situation, the most important competencies being considered by the respondents as *the ability to communicate in the official language* (score 4.70) and *the ability to learn* (score 4.63). *The cultural expression competence* (score 3.7) has a lesser importance from the perspective of integrating the graduates on the labour market, followed at a very small distance by *the basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology* (score 3.74).

After processing the collected data – the general score – in order to assess the importance of key (cross) competencies that graduates should have to integrate on the labour market, the following is noticed:

- *the ability to learn* (score 4.76) and *the ability to communicate in the official language* (score 4.75) are considered to be the most important for the integration of graduates on the labour market;
- also in the category of very important competencies there is *the ability to communicate in foreign languages* (score 4.60);
- with regard to *computer skills* (score 4.46), the social and civic competencies (score 4.04) and entrepreneurial competencies (score 4.08), they have been considered by respondents as important for the graduates' integration on the labour market;
- also, *the basic skills in using the general notions of maths, science and technology* (score 3.73) and *the cultural expression competence* (score 3.85) are considered important, having, however, the score under the value of 4.

### 3.2. Professional competencies

However, common competencies are the only ones that should be considered for the graduates' adaptation to the requirements of the labour market. Besides these, there are a series of professional competencies that a potential employee should have.

The data collected on the professional competencies are presented in table 2.

From the analysis of the data processing on the professional competencies from the four towns where the workshops were organised, we conclude that:

- in **Sibiu** the highest score was calculated for the *Professional involvement* (4.78), closely followed by the *Professional effectiveness / Efficiency* (score 4.74). The lowest importance is given to *the Organisation of the profession (drafting a plan for personal professional development)* (score 4.19);

**Table 2. Professional competencies**

<b>Professional competencies</b>	<b>Score Sibiu</b>	<b>Score Cluj</b>	<b>Score Craiova</b>	<b>Score Timișoara</b>	<b>General score</b>
Competencies (expertise) specific to the field	4.44	4.65	4.42	4.59	4.53
Professional experience / Accomplishments	4.41	4.38	4.31	4.41	4.38
Professional effectiveness / efficiency	4.74	4.77	4.69	4.59	4.70
Professional involvement	4.78	4.85	4.81	4.74	4.80
Professional motivation (self evaluation of training needs for adapting professional competencies to the dynamics of the company and the labour market)	4.52	4.00	4.31	4.37	4.30
The organisation of the profession (drafting a plan for personal professional development)	4.19	4.00	4.08	4.04	4.00

- in **Cluj** the situation is similar to that in Sibiu, the respondents stating that the most important professional competencies necessary for the graduates' integration on the labour market are the *Professional involvement* (4.85) and *Professional Effectiveness / Efficiency* (score 4.77). The lowest level was obtained for *Professional motivation (self evaluation of training needs for adapting professional competencies to the dynamics of the company and the labour market)* and the *Organisation of the profession (drafting a plan for personal professional development)* (both with a score of 4.00);
- in **Craiova**, too, the most important professional competencies are also considered to be *Professional involvement* (4.81) and *Professional Effectiveness / Efficiency* (score 4.69). The *Organisation of the profession competence (drafting a plan for personal professional development)* registered the lowest score (4.08).
- **Timișoara** has a similar situation, the most important required competencies being considered by the respondents the *Professional involvement* (score 4.74), *Professional Effectiveness / Efficiency* and the *Competences (expertise) specific to the field – depending on each field of activity* (both with a score of 4.59). The lowest score was calculated for the *Organisation of the profession (drafting a plan for personal professional development)* (score 4.04).
- We notice that in all four towns where the workshops were organised, none of the professional competencies has obtained a score below the value of 4.00, which proves that these are considered by the respondents as very important or important for the graduates' integration on the labour market.

After processing the collected data – the general score – for the assessment of the professional competencies that graduates should have in order to integrate on the labour market, we can notice the following:

- *Professional involvement* (score 4.80) is considered as the most important for the graduates' integration on the labour market. Also in the category of "very important" there can be found the *professional effectiveness / efficiency* (score 4.70) and the competencies (expertise) specific to the field – depending on each field of activity (*Research-development, Production, Supply, Logistics, Sales, Marketing, Finance and Accounting, Personnel, legal, Administrative, Management*);
- There have been mentioned as important the *professional experience / accomplishments* (score 4.38), *professional motivation* (self evaluation of training needs for adapting professional competencies to the dynamics of the company and the labour market) – score 4.30 – and the organisation of the profession (*drafting a plan for personal professional development*) – score 4.00.

### 3.3. Other competencies and abilities

There are a number of other competencies and abilities that can, however, be more or less important, depending on the profession, the nature of work, the position held, etc.

The data collected on other competencies and abilities are presented in table 3.

From the analysis of the general scores, we can conclude that the most important competencies and abilities necessary for the graduates' integration on the labour market are considered to be the following:

- Fairness and honesty (score 4.74);
- Punctuality (score 4.66)
- The ability to use time efficiently (4.64);
- The ability to work in a team (4.64)
- The ability to communicate effectively (4.62);
- The ability to cope with change (adaptability to new situations, risk management) (4.47).

The lowest values of the general score are for the synthesis and analysis capacity (score 3.89), the ability to assert and the ability to motivate and influence the others (score 3.86), the availability to work long hours (3.53), the willingness to accept criticism (score 3.71), the capacity for critical analysis and self-criticism (score 3.73).

In order to obtain additional information, participants were asked to select the main 3 key competencies and abilities, and 6 other competencies and abilities, considered as necessary for the graduates' integration on the labour market (Craiova does not appear in this classification because the methodology was later on changed).

From the analysis of the collected data on town for the key (cross) competencies, we conclude that:

- **Sibiu** – the most important key competence is considered to be „*The ability to learn*” – 18 votes, followed by „*The ability to communicate in foreign languages*” – 14 votes;
- **Cluj** – the most important key competence is considered to be „*The ability to learn*” – 15 votes, followed by „*The ability to communicate in foreign languages*” – 14 votes;
- **Timișoara** – the most important key competence is considered to be „*The ability to learn*” – 13 votes, followed by „*The ability to communicate in foreign languages*” – 12 votes.

**Table 3. Other competencies and abilities**

<b>Other competencies and abilities</b>	<b>Score Sibiu</b>	<b>Score Cluj</b>	<b>Score Craiova</b>	<b>Score Timișoara</b>	<b>General score</b>
The ability to cope with change	4.67	4.38	4.54	4.30	4.47
Creativity and innovative thinking	4.37	4.19	3.88	4.33	4.20
Synthesis and analysis capacity	4.00	3.81	3.69	4.07	3.89
The ability to organise and coordinate & The ability to solve problems	4.52	4.35	4.23	4.48	4.39
The ability to take decisions	4.52	4.04	4.23	4.41	4.30
The ability to assert & the ability to motivate and influence the others	4.11	3.62	3.73	3.96	3.86
The ability to work in a team	4.59	4.62	4.65	4.70	4.64
The ability to negotiate	4.41	4.19	3.88	4.48	4.24
The ability to communicate effectively	4.48	4.81	4.62	4.59	4.62
Resistance to stress	4.07	4.19	4.35	4.67	4.32
The ability to use time efficiently	4.59	4.73	4.62	4.63	4.64
Availability to work long hours	3.37	3.81	3.35	3.59	3.53
Punctuality	4.52	4.88	4.65	4.59	4.66
Interpersonal abilities	3.93	3.92	3.81	4.04	3.92
Willingness to accept criticism	3.74	3.58	3.96	3.56	3.71
The capacity for critical analysis and self-criticism	3.85	3.58	3.77	3.74	3.73
Fairness and honesty	4.70	4.96	4.73	4.56	7.74

From the analysis of the collected data on towns for the professional competencies, we conclude that:

- **Sibiu** – the most important key competence is considered to be „Professional involvement” – 14 votes, followed by „Professional effectiveness / Efficiency” – 13 votes;
- **Cluj** – the most important key competence is considered to be the „Professional involvement” – 21 votes, followed by „Professional effectiveness / Efficiency” – 17 votes;
- **Timișoara** – the most important key competence is considered to be „Professional motivation (self evaluation of training needs for adapting professional competencies to the dynamics of the company and the labour market)” – 13 votes, followed by „Competencies (expertise) specific to the field – depending on each field of activity (Research-Development, Production, Supply, Logistics, Sales, Marketing, Finance and Accounting, Personnel, Legal, Administrative, Management)” – 11 votes.

From the analysis of the collected data collected on towns for other competencies and abilities necessary for the graduates' integration of the labour market, we conclude that:

- **Sibiu** – the greatest percentage of respondents chose „The ability to work in a team” and „Fairness and honesty”, both with 17 votes each, closely followed by „The ability to cope with change (adaptability to new situations, risk management)” which registered 16 votes;
- In **Cluj** – most respondents chose „Fairness and honesty” – 16 votes, followed by „The ability to work in a team” which got 15 votes;
- In **Timișoara** the respondents first chose „The ability to cope with change (adaptability to new situations, risk management)” which got 13 votes. This is followed, with 11 votes, by „Resistance to stress” (11 votes) and „The ability to work in a team” (10 votes).

#### 4. GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

The most important key (cross) competencies that graduates should have to be able to integrate on the labour market are considered to be *the ability to learn* (score 4.76) and *the ability to communicate in the official language* (score 4.75). Also in the category of very important competencies there can be found *the ability to communicate in foreign languages* (score 4.60). With regard to *computer skills* (score 4.46), *the social and civic competencies* (score 4.04) and *entrepreneurial competencies* (score 4.08), these have been considered by the respondents as important for the graduates' integration on the labour market.

*Professional involvement* (score 4.80) is considered to be the most important **professional competence** for the graduates' integration on the labour market. Also in the category of “very important” there can be found “*The Professional effectiveness / Efficiency* (score 4.70) and *the Competencies (expertise) specific to the field – depending on each field of activity*” (Research-Development, Production, Supply, Logistics, Sales, Marketing, Finance and Accounting, Personnel, Legal, Administrative, Management) – score 4.53.

After the general classification of the **other competencies and abilities**, “*The ability to work in a team*” obtained the greatest number of options from the respondents, followed by “*The ability to cope with change (adaptability to new situations, risk management)*” and “*Fairness and honesty*”.

As a conclusion, the acquisition and further development of competencies are crucial for improving the graduates' employment perspectives and they contribute to personal fulfilment, social inclusion and active citizenship. The Romanian education, through the provided curriculum, has to be adapted so that it helps graduates acquire the competencies and abilities necessary for the immediate integration on the labour market and also for continuous learning for their development. Developing the curricula, teaching, evaluation and learning environments should be based consistently on the results of the teaching process, and on the knowledge, skills, abilities and competencies that need to be acquired by learners.

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