

Statement on the revision of the EU key competences framework

The European Federation for Intercultural Learning has been using the [8 key competences framework](#) to define learning outcomes of volunteers and pupils involved in our learning mobility programmes. However, we believe that intercultural competence is not well included in the 8 key competences and that at this time of revision of the framework, it is important to bring some clarity in the definitions.

In the current framework, intercultural competence is included under ‘social and civic competences’ but no proper definition is provided. Intercultural aspects are touched upon both definition of social and civic competences, but there is not a clear space given to the specificities related to ‘intercultural competence’.

Therefore, at the moment, intercultural competence, instead of being clearly identified by educators under ‘social and civic competences’ where it belongs in the framework, it is confused with ‘Cultural awareness and expression’. However, ‘cultural awareness and expression’ only refers to one dimension of intercultural competence, namely the one related to cultural heritage and arts. Intercultural competence is much more than this.

Finally, intercultural aspects are also mentioned in the definition of communication in foreign languages.

In addition, the current definition does not adequately reflect the global dimension that any kind of social and civic participation entails in our increasingly interconnected society.

Also, a reference to the global dimension would be helpful to allow a pertinent harmonisation with the Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (CDC) of the Council of Europe, and the OECD’s PISA assessment¹. In fact, Council of Europe Members states have agreed in implementing the CDC in school curricula and assess students accordingly, and at the same time in 2018 there will be the first PISA assessment of global competence. The latter will offer a comprehensive overview of educational system’s success in equipping young people to support the development of peaceful, diverse communities. Moreover the Sustainable Development Goals make a clear reference to Global citizenship education under Goal 4- Quality Education.

Moreover, the ‘social and civic competences’ cannot be cut off from the “political competences” that imply an active citizen, with rights and obligations.

For the revision of the current framework we suggest to:

- Provide a clear definition of intercultural competence by 1) making it separate competences, 2) or include it under social and civic competences with a proper definition.
- Provide also a clear definition of culture, from a non-essentialist view.
- Provide a clear list of attitudes, skills and knowledge for each of the competences, in order to provide practical examples to educators
- Include the concept of “global competence” and reference to the core dimensions of “global citizenship education” in the description of social and civic competences.
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- Include ‘sustainable development’ under civic competences.

¹ OECD, (2016) *Global competency for an inclusive world, 2016*

² Byram (2008) *From Foreign Language Education to Education for Intercultural Citizenship*

- The competence 'cultural awareness and expression' is changed to 'creativity and cultural heritage' to better convey its content, and clear links are made with intercultural competence, where this is defined.
- Transversal competences should be named and defined.
- Civic competences should focus on the empowerment of learners for active participation and constructive critical dialogue and action.³
- In the definition of each competence, the links with other competences of the framework should be made evident and clear. See at the end of this document the list of links between intercultural competence and the other competences.

Having read the Commission's proposal to 1) include a stronger intercultural dimension under cultural awareness and expression and 2) divide this competence in two, namely a personal and a societal dimension, with the first one fitting under 'learning to learn' and the latter being called 'civic competence',

we suggest:

- 1) **Intercultural competence goes much beyond cultural awareness and expression and is a social competence**, which builds on different competences, ranging from language competence to learning to learn, to cultural awareness.
- 2) The **new competence related to the personal dimension**, including intercultural competence, should **not be called 'learning to learn'** but include also the competence learning to learn. A potential name would be **'personal and social competences'**.

We therefore suggest the **following definition of intercultural competence**:

Intercultural competence is the ability to mobilise and deploy relevant attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to interact effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations⁴. This competence includes recognition and appreciation of one's own and others' multiplicities and how they come into play in different situations. The competence should not resume to prescriptive solutions for 'specific cultures' and instead focus on preparing for the unexpected, careful perception and dealing with uncertainty.

This statement is also supported by:

European Education Exchanges – Youth for Understanding
Hellenic Association for Intercultural Education (HAIE)

³ Council of Europe - Barrett, M. et al (2016), *Competences for Democratic Culture: Living together as equals in culturally diverse democratic societies*.

⁴ D.K. Deardorff, *The SAGE book of intercultural competence*; Council of Europe, *Competences for democratic culture*

Definitions of concepts linked to intercultural competence

The assumed concept of culture

The non-essentialist view of culture (see *Adrian Holliday, 2011*) stresses the complexity and multiplicity of individual identities, going way beyond geographical or family backgrounds. People participate in different groups or cultures, which may be defined according to nationality, ethnicity, language, age, social class, gender, religion, political or sexual orientation, etc. Their sense of belonging is not only multiple, but it also shifts - increasing or diminishing in intensity - according to the context and purpose of their interactions, as well as their interlocutors. The cultural identity may be inconsistent, negotiated and co-constructed in different situations, and may depend on power and voice in a given relationship.

Intercultural situations (see *Competences for democratic culture, CoE, p. 20*)

Every interpersonal situation is potentially an intercultural situation. Often, when we encounter other people, we respond to them as individuals who have a range of attributes distinguishing them from other people. However, sometimes we respond to them instead in terms of their cultural affiliations, and when this occurs we group them together with other people who share these affiliations with them. There are several factors which prompt us to shift our frame of reference from the individual and interpersonal to the intercultural. These include, among others:

- the presence of salient cultural emblems or practices that invoke the cultural category in the mind of the perceiver,
- the frequent use of cultural categories to think about other people so that these categories are readily accessed when interacting with others,
- usefulness of a cultural category in helping to understand why another person is behaving in the way that they are, etc.

Thus, intercultural situations arise when an individual perceives another person (or group of people) as being culturally different from themselves. Every human being is regularly exposed to intercultural situations, with or without direct interactions with others.

Intercultural competence - ability to mobilise and deploy relevant attitudes, skills and knowledge in order to interact effectively and appropriately in different intercultural situations.

(D.K. Deardorff, *The SAGE book of intercultural competence*; CoE, *Competences for democratic culture*)

Intercultural competence include recognition and appreciation of one's own and others' multiplicities and how they come into play in different situations. It should not resume to prescriptive solutions for 'specific cultures' and instead focus on preparing for the unexpected, careful perception and dealing with uncertainty. It implies readiness to deal with difference in an ethno-relative manner (viewing values and behaviours of others from broader perspectives, and not seeing one's own as normal/superior). However it also needs to avoid the mechanism of othering - seeing the world in categories us vs. them, where "them" are those who are different from me/us. Identifying and labeling "the other" tends to ascribe a fixed identity to them, where it may be difficult or impossible to contest the ascription (hence intercultural competence includes also issues of power and voice of interlocutors).

Intercultural competence is tightly linked to empathy, listening and observing, critical thinking, flexibility, conflict resolution skills and tolerance of ambiguity. They also go hand in hand with civic-mindedness, valuing democracy and human rights.



Acquisition of intercultural competence (intercultural learning) is a lifelong learning process, which brings best results through conscious, planned and facilitated experiential learning (D.Kolb, *Experiential Learning*, 1984). It is important to note that exposure and interaction with people of different cultural affiliations does not imply, let alone guarantee, intercultural learning (Y.Amir, *Contact Hypothesis in Ethnic Relations*, 1969). It is also worth noting that the non-formal education sector has so far the strongest experience in facilitating these educational processes.

Assessment of intercultural competence is a complex task, which cannot be responded by standard quantitative testing procedures. Since intercultural learning is a life-long learning process, intercultural competence can never be fully achieved. Assessment should be qualitative and formative, voluntary, participatory, tailored and learner centred.



Links between Intercultural competence and other Key Competences

Next to the multiple links with social and civic competences (see above), intercultural competence is also connected to other groups of competences in the framework. This link is twofold: 1) intercultural competence is needed to perform well in other key competences, and 2) other key competences are needed in order to develop intercultural competence.

Mother tongue and Foreign languages, including body language

1. Competence in a foreign language always requires knowledge of the foreign culture, skill to detect different situations determined by a different environment, attitude of being open and tolerant of ambiguity in order to express yourself in the most appropriate way within a given context.
2. Competence in a foreign language is needed to fully understand other culture and be interculturally competent.

Awareness of cultural heritage

1. Being aware of the cultural and linguistic diversity in the world is essential to understand how each culture has been influenced and will continue being influenced by other ones over time.
2. Being aware of one's own cultural heritage and of others, and how it influences identities and relationships.

Learning to learn

- 2) Being able to learn, including having motivation and ability to change attitudes and behaviours, is essential to develop intercultural competence.

Digital competences / media literacy

- 1) Media literacy requires also a certain degree of (inter) cultural sensitivity.
- 2) Media are a source of knowledge about different cultures and social media allow for a direct exchange between people from diverse cultural backgrounds.
"Media discourse is the main source of people's knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, both of other elites and of ordinary citizens. Of course, the media do this in joint production with the other elites, primarily politicians, professionals and academics." (Van Dijk, 2000, p. 36).

Entrepreneurship

- 1) In an increasingly global market, teamwork and entrepreneurship are skills practiced in multicultural groups, therefore intercultural competence plays an important role.
- 2) Self-efficacy is needed to develop intercultural competence: "self efficacy is the positive belief in one's own ability to undertake actions and confidence that one can understand issues, select appropriate methods, navigate obstacles successfully" (see *Competences for democratic culture*).

Yet, the focus of intercultural competence on interaction gives it a clear place next to the social/interpersonal/civic ones.

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