## **Validating Integration Competences**



## **Practical Phase**



## Feasibility and impact report



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https://integrationcompetence.eu



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### 1. Background

VIC is a two-year European project (2017-2019) and stands for the validation of integration competences. It was financed by the Erasmus+ programme and implemented by a consortium of partners from Germany (DVV International, BUPNET, and VHS Kassel), Italy (ENAIPNET), Greece (Aristotele University Thessaloniki), France (EUOCIRCLE), Austria (die BERATER). In the framework of the project a blended learning course on validating integration competences of migrants and refugees was developed. This course and materials are available on the projects Website: https://integrationcompetence.eu/

### 2. Introduction to the report

Many European countries - in reaction to strong migrant and refugee population movement (the latter especially from 2015 onwards) - have established a diversity of educational services and programmes aiming to increase integration competences of the newcomers. But considering that the different programmes do not necessarily define 'integration' competences in a precise way this was the starting point for the VIC project aiming to:

- Collect the varying objectives of integration programmes across Europe and distil from them an operational working definition of "integration competence"
- Provide adult educators working with refugee immigrants with tools to promote, plan, actively develop and validate integration competences among the target group
- Implement these tools in various different types of educational programmes
- Carefully evaluate their feasibility, adequacy and impact

The feasibility and impact report, delivered as IO4 by DVV International, ensures that the VIC approach and the blended-learning course developed by the project partnership is practice-fit and feasible to support the validation of integration competences identified and developed in the framework of the project. The course materials were first developed in English, then translated into the languages of the partnership (German, Greek, French, Italian) and piloted with trainers and educators. In every partner country (Austria, France, Greece, Italy, Germany) the blended learning course (O3) has been held with a range of trainers/multipliers/educators with different backgrounds specified in the national reports. These multipliers/trainers have applied the VIC approach in a variety of integration and support measures with refugees and migrants. The type of beneficiaries reached and their experiences are documented in the national reports annexed to this synthesis report. National reports emphasise the achievements and successes, challenges met, solutions found, improvement areas and on the individual impact of the competence validation on the refugee immigrants.

To identify the results of the VIC project quantitative and qualitative indicators were taken into account. They are the basis of the results as reported in the following chapter.

Additionally an external evaluation was undertaken that focuses specifically on feed-back to the e-learning platform and the content of the course. The evaluation forms a complementary part of the IO4 report.



### 3. Selected Results

All partners were required to produce a national experience report in English of about ten pages length with the objective of summarising all feed-back collected from trainers who participated in the piloting in the different countries. The requirement for the national reports included a description of the context (target groups, processes, involvement of trainers (external/internal) to enable a good background understanding of the pilot. The national reports on the piloting were set up to provide an analysis of all the points mentioned (positive and critical) with regard to using the VIC learning platform, but also the experience with the transfer of what trainers learned to their practice with their learners. The reports should also give some ideas of the added value of using VIC approach from the trainers' perspective and further leading recommendations for improvement. Additionally the usability and feasibility of the VIC methodology and the blended learning course should be evaluated, lessons learned reflected and recommendations made for future use. Each partner was asked to reflect on the impact (e.g. organisational learning, development of good practice, transfer to own context, funding, transferability (using materials in other contexts and with other target groups) and sustainability aspects.

Whereas the national reports give detailed insights into the piloting process and results of VIC, the overall IO4 report is a synthesis of all five national reports (available on the projects website) with the aim of providing inspiration and practice insights to a wider adult education community who can thus benefit from lessons learned in the piloting of the VIC approach and exploit these for their own future integration practices.

The following tables summarise some quantitative aspects of the VIC project. It needs to be stressed though, that in light of the short time frame of two years for the overall project and six months for the piloting phase, the main focus of the VIC Project was on piloting the VIC approach and the blended learning course first with the multipliers and trainers and collecting their feed-back on the feasibility of transferring the validation concept developed in VIC to a learning project in practice. In so far the quantitative aspects were not a major objective of the project, but are here displayed for reasons of complementarity. To the project partnership a critical and substantial piloting was considered to have a higher value than reaching out to a large audience in this first development phase of the VIC blended-learning course.

#### **Quantitative aspects**

Table 1

Number of adult educators and integration professional participating in the blended learning course (pilots)

Austria	France	Germany I	Germany II	Greece	Italy	Total
12	20	12	14	17	12	87



#### Table 2

Number of refugees/migrants directly benefiting from the pilot (beneficiaries) during the project

Austria	France	Germany I	Germany II	Greece	Italy	Total
120	120	45	50	83	113	531

#### **Qualitative aspects**

#### 1. Feasibility of Validating Integration Competences

The specific pedagogical concept of VIC based on four main features can be considered a major key to the success of VIC. These are:

- a competence oriented approach,
- a three dimensional validation of learning integration competences with head, heart and hand including specifically the affective dimension (validated through) LEVEL5
- the manifestation of validating a learning process through the medium of a learning project
- Applying the validation tool to existing integration curricula and professional trainings by way of a change in perspective.

Integration means above all the active creation of equal opportunities - regardless of national, cultural and/or ethnic affiliation. It requires a common basis, namely our constitution. A positive attitude towards cultural diversity and a binding attitude towards the basic values and rules of democracy are not mutually exclusive. Together, they form the basis for the coexistence of citizens of different origins. Integration is a reciprocal process between long-established and immigrant populations. It presupposes a willingness to speak and understand the same language and requires steps towards rapprochement on both sides (VIC, 2019, Module 1.1.2).

After revising existing integration competence approaches in the different countries, the VIC project partnership agreed to **define integration as the competence of** '*learning to live together in a diverse society*' and as the key set of integration competences the following:

- dealing with diversity
- intercultural communication
- working together to live and learn in a diverse society
- communication
- flexibility
- networking
- reliability
- willingness to learn
- problem solving
- critical thinking
- conflict management
- productive autonomy
- resilience
- social commitment



VIC is based on a learning outcome-oriented approach, which makes it possible to evaluate and validate competences. A competence is a person's potential in the dimensions of knowledge, skills & abilities and attitudes & values in a specific context and a particular quality (VIC, 2019, Module 4.1.1).

#### 2. Impact of the course on trainers

In all country reports we find evidence reported that using the VIC tool proved for some trainers to be a completely new experience. Especially those trainers working in the integration courses appreciated the exchange of experiences with their colleagues about the VIC approach. German trainers also stated that they appreciated the possibility to have a space for networking and exchanging best practices with colleagues from other organisations and that thanks to these trainings they were also able to have a space for improvement and reflection of their professional practice.

Some of the pilots were conducted in the frame of current and specific course measures, most of them restricted under a tight 'integration curriculum' scheme, which meant that trainers could often not develop a specific learning project, but had to find ways to set competence oriented activities in the specific given context, reframing the course environment as to include the objective of validating a learning process.

For example *Austria* reports as added value and impact of using the VIC approach: So far, the training course had been more a "Question and Answer" session. Participants asked about Austria and the trainer answered them. So the VIC training tools were very helpful for them to **think about another way of designing their training lessons**. The focus was on the development of the competences *communication, cooperation, reliability, and willingness to learn*.

France specifies in its national report that even those trainers that already knew about the competence oriented approach had not related it to their own professional practice. Even though for most of the trainers, transversal skills are very important, when talking about the success of migrants and refugees' integration, almost none of them had thought of **introducing a set of competence-oriented initiatives in their learning program**. Recognising and evaluating the 'integration competences' developed in the VIC therefore project was a new challenge for all trainers.

Some of them stated that in their daily work they would automatically consider these transversal skills, but not necessarily think of introducing concrete activities in order to observe the development and validate these skills.

Most of the participants in the pilots, many of them with a migrant an refugee background themselves, valued the learning centred approach and reflected on how to adapt their courses in order to increase the autonomy, motivation and reflection of the learners.

In the piloting in France during the first face-to-face training and while working on the e-platform different learning projects were defined. Some professionals decided to adapt the same learning project to their own integration program. The focus of these learning projects was the development and validation of the following competences: communication, cooperation, intercultural competence, dealing with diversity, autonomy and willingness to learn. The activities selected by most of the language trainers were either the "classroom magazine" or the "intercultural party". One language trainer working with minors decided to work on the



"cooking event". All trainers of general and transversal qualification courses chose to organise the "employability workshop". Two trainers working with families in vocational qualification assessment programs decided to work on the "cooking event" and the trainers in European values integration courses and the sociocultural mediator decided to work on the "intercultural party".

Feed-back on experiences of the pilot in *Germany* of online learners and trainers in the learning projects was principally positive. They found the approach innovative and useful. In general, they found of great value to reflect on their own practice and learn about competence-based training and validation. They got new impulses for their training delivery and their work with their learners. Even in the cases where they had to cope with strict curriculum requirements they could find ways to integrate new elements in their training. Their learners were positive about reflecting on their competence development and felt that also competences that are not directly job-related represented an asset.

The trainers themselves confirmed that they like the concept of integration on which the VIC training is based - learning to live together in a diverse society. They mentioned that, however, this concept is hardly considered in the current integration courses that are rather unilateral – the learners are expected to learn the language, values and culture of the receiving society but the receiving society is hardly ever involved in this process. Only in the case of mixed groups such as the 5-day course in one of the learning projects do people with different background learn together and from each other. Also, it was mentioned that the strict curriculum of the obligatory courses do not offer much room for additional activities. They felt that VIC could be integrated all the same quite well as **things could simply be done differently instead of adding new things**.

The national report of the pilots in *Italy* contains an analysis in detail of the impact on the trainers stating that the VIC approach allows to integrate the training and counselling offer strengthening training skills and abilities in **supporting job integration of migrants**. Moreover, the VIC project has provided contents, methods and tools which will be made available by the Italian partner in the future as a sort of virtual library. Finally, the attendance of the course and the design and implementation of the piloting have allowed the trainers to share problems and opportunities which they encounter in working with migrants. The report also gives a detailed feed-back on the added value of the methodology, which is also the main objective of the external evaluation. In the different contexts in Italy the VIC approach was appreciated thanks to the **versatility of the set of skills, the modularity and variety of methods and tools and the opportunity to implement it with other target groups**.

#### 3. Impact of the course on beneficiaries

Across all pilots a specific impact on the beneficiaries was noticed, and although depending on the context, the duration, the specific learning project or the different way in which a competence oriented approach was applied, beneficiaries appreciated the approach as contributing to their awareness of the importance of soft-skills, their self-esteem and motivation. National reports give more insights, the following extracts mainly aim to highlight some of the experiences.

Trainers in Austria selecting the competences intercultural competences critical thinking, will-ingness to learn, dealing with diversity and reliability to work with beneficiaries reported a



positive development among all their participants on their attitude and especially their motivation to communicate in German language. This was a specific challenge and success, since many refugees have the tendency to think that they will only stay a limited time in Austria wishing to return to their home country as soon as possible. So often the motivation to learn German is not that high. In the case of implementing a learning project the high level of involvement in teamwork and the very practical oriented activities gave the participants more reason to put more effort into learning the German language.

Also - with the VIC material the learners were encouraged to become more active and to work in a different way and more independently on certain tasks. Also they seemed to be much more curious and motivated by this new way of working together in the group.

Further observations highlighted by the trainers piloting VIC in Austria were:

- An improvement in communication competences and as a result more active participation and involvement in teamwork
- More self-confidence of the beneficiaries

Apart from applying the VIC approach in current courses as described above, one of the pilots in Austria reported the impact from a learning project as follows: The learning activity which was focused on in this certain course was "planning a neighbourhood party" — with the variation that the task for the learners was to plan and organise a party for their course group at the end of the "Competence check" course. The main benefit was that this was a concrete task, not too abstract and the learners could see a real benefit for themselves, since it was a social activity and they had fun doing it. The language learning aspect was highlighted, since the trainer advised the leaners to communicate as much as possible in German. The learners from the neighbour class were also invited to the party — they were mainly Austrian participants — so it was necessary to communicate in German.

The national report on piloting in Germany I (BUPNET) reports observations of trainers involved in the learning projects who stated that their learners evolved in terms of reflecting on their competences and in formulating their learning progress. Learners acquired integration competences that also have a value on the job market and in any other societal contexts. They mentioned that the reflection on learning outcomes other than those that the course is supposed to achieve (e.g. linguistic or job related ones) is something that they have not done before. It brings an added value to the training and profiling as it engages learners in a reflection process on competences that are not in the primary focus but that are all the same very important in terms of employability (e.g. intercultural communication, teamwork). Learners also showed interest in reflecting on the competence development within the course and were pleased to see that they had actually evolved. Many of them had little learning successes in recent years and so they had a sense of achievement – this had a very positive effect on their self-esteem.

The national report from *France* summarises that all trainers were happy about the results and reported a **positive development among their learners**. Most of the learners felt comfortable participating in these learning projects. In almost all cases more "integration competences" than those validated emerged. Apart from the "officially" chosen skills, learners worked on their *self-confidence*, *cooperation skills*, *conflict management and problem solving skill*, *adaptability and flexibility*.



Trainers stated that in some cases, learners who wouldn't be very pro-active during the integration course, would suddenly step out and **become active for the learning project**. For example a trainer talked about a learner that would never participate in the classroom activity, but when they decided to organise the cooking event, he got very motivated, and became the "coordinator" of the cooking event, helping the others choose their dish and being the 'motivator' for the group.

In *Greece* specifically it became clear that one of the biggest obstacles refugees and asylum seekers face in their daily lives in Greece is the **language barrier**. Not being able to communicate with local people creates major problems in their integration and interaction with Greek authorities and public services.

Also the very uncertain future of refugees contributes to difficulties for a smooth integration process. One of the educators suggested that "...the problem is that no one really knows what will happen in the near future. We are talking about thousands of people, families, some of them not skilled, not even educated. They are not capable to work but they have to live somehow and live with dignity. Each state needs to help them with financial assistance or at least provide them with shelter, food, clothes, etc. This is rather good news for those who will eventually be relocated or reunified with their families in the European countries. For the rest, it is very difficult. We do not have the means to do successfully integrate them here in Greece. We rely on EU funds and on the active role of some NGOs who provide relief to these people".

From experience with the VIC piloting a suggestion for a solution could be sought in the **validation of social and personal competences of those refugees that enter Greece**. Acknowledging the different contexts between the Greek islands and mainland, where the conditions still require improvement, but are undoubtedly much better than on the islands, access to validation services during reception conditions on the islands are seen to be able to support the pathway of refugees to better integration on the mainland.

Although *Italy* piloted the VIC course in very diverse settings and levels of trainers i.e. one being with intercultural mediators and the other with cleaning company operators the feedback given related to the methodological and pedagogical aspect and reflections conclude that the **added value** of the approach lies in that **competence-oriented learning integrates technical contents** proposed during the planned lessons with **soft skills giving them visibility and value**.

Based on observations from piloting in *Italy* and feed-back from the multiplyers on the learning process of the beneficiaries the following impacts were highlighted:

- Development of awareness of personal characteristics
- Development of specific competences (for example networking or problem solving)
- Improvement of knowledge on theoretical aspects connected with these competences
- Development of the ability to act the competence in a professional context and to use the competence as a "concrete tool"
- Improvement of the ability in self-evaluation and the reflective capacity

There was also a very positive feed-back on the learning project, that the piloting enabled the beneficiaries to value their transversal skills in relation to the specific job profile they were learning and to be more aware about the importance of the transversal skills.



#### 4. Wider Impact of VIC

As part of the national reports feedback on further reaching impact and implications of the project can be summarised as follows:

The **project's impact on involved organisations** and on those that they have **liaised with** during the project:

- Extended and consolidated networks
- Increased awareness that integration can be supported by interactive learning activities and that their learning outcomes can be validated
- New methodology that can be transferred in various course setting with various target groups
- Increased cooperation among the trainers inside the same branch and among different branches (e.g. in the case of the Italian partner ENAIP that has several branches in northern Italy and the Austrian partner die Berater that has several branches across Austria
- Synergies among and transfer of methods and knowledge of various projects addressing refugees and migrants
- Opportunity for continuous professional development (CPD) of involved trainers
- Increased knowledge of and flexibility in using validation
- Involvement of external stakeholders into the piloting →strengthen relationship / network with organisation working with refugees /migrants
- Transfer European practice to organisational practice (also local see next question)
- Increased knowledge on how partners work in project related fields and with target groups

# The impact of the project at the local, regional, European and/or international levels:

- Exchange of good practice at local level and all other levels
- Case studies and concrete examples of how to work with validation, competence development etc.
- Increased awareness of the fact that transversal competences have a value (e.g. for the job market)
- Increased motivation to work on the development of transversal competences both for trainers and their learners
- Upgraded skills for trainers
- New tools and CPD offer
- KA1 offer for European trainers

Additional/new **target groups** that could be potentially interested in using the VIC products?

- Employment counsellours
- Internship mentors
- Workplace mentors
- Trainers who work with young students at risk of drop-out
- Care-takers that work with refugees
- Teachers in school



Administrative staff in all services for refugees

All partners confirmed that they will continue to use a number of VIC elements after funding finishes, among these are:

- Use of the online platform for internal / external training (CPD)
- Keep on promoting the platform
- Internal qualification on VIC and its approach
- Promote the idea of competence oriented learning and validation in educational offers involving refugees and migrants and other disadvantaged groups
- Implement certain aspects in their own training offer and in labour market services

Apart from these summarised impacts from the partner organisations a master thesis of Katharina Graner recently submitted to the University of ESSEN has identified the innovative potential of VIC for the national integration courses of the agency BAMF in Germany. The research project conducted to provide input to the conclusions on how to use the VIC approach in the integration courses in Germany was based on questionnaires sent to various trainers participating in the blended-learning course.

The master thesis suggests 3 szenarios on how VIC could be a useful instrument not only for the validation of integration competences of migrants and refugees, but also to generate reflection on a broader concept of integration, which includes the necessary competences of members of the host society (Source: Master Thesis: Kompetenzvalidierung im Integrations- und Deutschkurs an Volkshochschulen - Neukonzipierung veralteter Kurskonzepte. Submitted November 2019 to University of Essen)



### 4. Recommendations for applying the VIC approach

Based on the experience of piloting both the learning resources and facilitating the learning projects, we can draw up a number of recommendations for applying the VIC approach.

#### **Validation**

- Courses that include elements of profiling, coaching, or reflection on own strengths and potentials can make use of the VIC validation approach as a tool to reflect on competences and to set goals.
- The validation is not an additional burden but should be embedded in given processes. It should contribute to developing and giving evidence to the aspired competences
- Use validation as a holistic way to strategically plan competence developments, e.g. define which competences are aspired, how they can be developed, validate the learning.
- The approach has to fit to the learning setting and should make use of innovative assessment methods that avoid the impression of formal exams.
- It has to consider in each case the specific purpose, activities, and settings. Moreover it also has to consider the situation, pre-knowledge and demands of the individual learner.

#### Assessing and evidencing competence developments of learners

- Trainers should make themselves familiar with the LEVEL5 system with its five steps and its 3-dimensional approach. They should make themselves familiar with the repository of competences that was set up for VIC and should not choose more than two or three competences that they would want to focus on through the learning activities.
- It is important to choose an appropriate method for assessing learners' competence development. For learners with low language skills, interactive methods can be used that do not require intensive conversation but encourage them to express their learning outcomes in a playful way. Self-assessment by means of the given reference systems or directly in the LEVEL5 software are likely to be (linguistically) too demanding
- Reflection on learning outcomes contributes to the positive impact of learning activities by making learning more conscious. But depending on the learners' language level, some creative methods are needed. In any case, it must be properly planned and takes time to be useful.
- For learners with better language proficiency or who wish to demonstrate their competences for concrete purposes such as job search, we recommend organising individual interviews to better reflect on their competences. In this way the process is more focused than in a group. Calculate at least half an hour per participant. Use the reference system to formulate interview questions in a simple language. Working directly with the reference system is too abstract.

### **Self-Assessment of competence developments (as a trainer)**

Use LEVEL5 as a reflection and assessment tool for understanding and assessing your competences.



- Read carefully the reference system of the competence(s) you have chosen before you start rating yourself;
- Rate yourself in all three dimensions by ticking one level per knowledge/skills/attitude at the beginning and at the end of your learning project;
- Think of concrete examples from your learning project that illustrate and reason your ratings and fill them in the respective fields in the grids;
- In the first instance use the reference systems provided on the platform as 'warm-up' before you actually access the LEVEL5 software where you can insert all your data, ratings and reasoning;
- If possible, discuss these ratings, and the reasons for them, with your mentor/colleague/HR manager maybe they can contribute with other examples;



## 5. Project Partners



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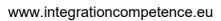


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