



IO1: Toolkit for Low Skilled Adults to develop their psychological capital



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1. Introduction

Despite the fact that Europe has been recovering from the high unemployment of recent years, the outbreak of COVID-19 that was declared a pandemic in March 2020 and the restrictive measures that have been introduced and applied to combat the virus have triggered a sharp increase in unemployment rates in Europe and worldwide. At the same time, the unstable social and political conditions, the complexity and dynamic nature of the contemporary business environments, the high competition, and the continuous technological advancements, make the need for individuals' personal growth and development imperative in order to find or maintain a job position.

Although people need to be employed, not only to cover the basic needs that are essential for their living but also to satisfy their psychological needs, however, many of them do not have those qualifications that are required by the employers. Low-skilled adults have limited labor market prospects and are more likely to work in low-paying sectors, earning lower than average wages, compared to high-skilled workers (Christopoulou & Monastiriotes, 2019).

OVERCOME project aims to enhance low-skilled adults' competencies and support their inclusion in the labor market and society. Its main objective is to reinforce low-skilled adults' employability skills – that are the skills, attributes and personal qualities that are necessary for getting, keeping and doing well on a job- as well as their psychological capacities. More specifically, seven discrete employability skills namely creativity, critical thinking, goal setting, problem-solving, self-motivation, communication, and teamwork, and six psychological characteristics namely hope, resilience, strengths, self-efficacy, calling, and meaning will be enhanced by using the core principles of the Positive Psychology approach.

OVERCOME project's main objectives are to build the skills of career counselors and adult educators to better support low-skilled adults, to improve the psychological capital of low skilled-adults, and to develop resources with quality material, curricula, toolkits, and OERs to build the competencies of low-skilled adults and their educators/counselors. To achieve these objectives, the OVERCOME project has developed a multifaceted toolkit and training courses

that address the above-mentioned employability skills and psychological characteristics in order to help beneficiaries become more competitive in the labor market.

2. Objectives of the Toolkit

One of the main objectives of the OVERCOME project is the toolkit design and development that is addressed to both low-skilled unemployed adults who need to be supported in their job search and low-skilled workers who need to be empowered in terms of job retention. The OVERCOME toolkit is designed to help low-skilled adults improve their employability skills, enhance their psychological capacities, and improve their well-being levels so as to be capable of overcoming the obstacles of obtaining or retaining a job. The OVERCOME toolkit includes summaries of key concepts (low-skilled adults / unemployed, employability skills, hope and optimism, resilience, character strengths, meaning and purpose), practical strategies and tips, self-assessment, employability guides and support, and material addressing the psychological capital of low-skilled adults.

The educational and cultural differences of the partner countries have been taken under consideration, and the toolkit contents are applicable to all countries and appropriate for any level of education and expertise of the beneficiaries. Several prototype reviews and feedback have ensured cultural relevance of the educational material developed. The OVERCOME toolkit is a user-friendly package with resources.

The OVERCOME Curriculum includes a module dedicated to employability skills and four modules deriving from Positive Psychology's key principles (hope and optimism, resilience, character strengths, meaning and purpose). The material includes one to one exercises and also individual activities. It offers a variety of strategies and resources, which are helpful to different people with diverse needs. The OVERCOME Curriculum can be used by career guidance professionals who work with low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed, but also by the end-users, the low-skilled individuals, as self-guidance and self-help practice.

3. Definition of Key Concepts

a) Low Skilled Adults / Unemployed

Low Skilled Adults can be defined as adults who have low educational levels and often, have not completed high school or equivalent (OECD, 2019). These adults often have limited skills and knowledge required to integrate successfully into economic and socio-cultural lives (Zelezny-Green, Vosloo and Conole, 2018), but can complete basic reading, writing and arithmetic tasks. It is estimated that at least 20% of adults across the OECD have low skills levels.

Low Skilled Adults or those outside of the labour market are often some of the most vulnerable people in our society, as they are often unable to identify opportunities that are available to them. Global megatrends, such as demographic changes, globalisation and technical progress are further highlighting the disparities faced by Low Skilled and Unemployed Adults across Europe. Opportunities and employment prospects for those with low skills are often greatly reduced due to the increasing pressures placed on the labour market, and the need for high skills levels.

Adults with low educational attainment levels often find themselves victims to the ‘Low Skills Trap’, which is categorised by low paying jobs, reduced training and development opportunities, and sparingly available opportunities for growth and progression within a company. These low skills traps are often jobs that can be heavily impacted upon by deteriorating economic changes, which result in long-periods of unemployment faced by these low-skilled adults.

It is important to recognise that although low skilled adults may not possess a wide array of educational achievements, they have a range of valuable skills that they have learned throughout their lives. Through identification of their key skills and attributes, they can increase their chances of integrating successfully into the labour market and escaping the “low skills trap”.

b. Employability Skills

The current 2021 post-pandemic global job market is characterized by change, need for flexibility and increased competition for acquiring a job position. In the 21st century workplace the occupation-specific skills are no longer adequate sufficient for graduates to meet the needs of the labour market (Damoah, 2021). Recent events and the ground-breaking COVID19 pandemic phenomenon inflicted a tremendous amount of changes and ramifications in the labour market and higher education sector, all of whom captured the attention of a plethora of researchers, policymakers and employers when it comes to re-defining the traits, knowledge and skills of desired candidates and/or perspective employees. Professionals are expected nowadays to also have an additional skillset of attributes often called as “employability skills” (Suartha et al., 2017).

The term “employability” is often used interchangeably with the concept of “work-readiness”. According to ACT (2013), a “work-ready” individual possesses the foundational skills which are the minimum required as previous qualification for a specific professional occupation as determined from a specific job analysis or a more broad occupational profile. Yorke (2010) defines work-readiness as a set of conditions minimal sufficient for acquiring an initial employment post.

Moreover, “employability skills” is often used to describe the notion of an individual possessing a set of skills, both general and cross-disciplinary (e.g., teamwork, communication, time-management) and discipline specific (e.g., the skills and knowledge relevant to psychology practice, law or business management), as well as personal attributes (e.g. self-regulation, resilience, self-confidence, discipline) and/or personality traits that align well with the duties or specific work environment (e.g. sociable, works better in isolation, responds well under pressure), which are relevant to employment and desired by the industry (Rowe & Zegwaard, 2017). In many occasions some skills overlap with each other. “Leadership” for example incorporates several other skills like decision-making, effective communication, organisation and mentoring.

Employability skills are often considered as a missing link between formal education and training and the world of work (Suartha, 2017). Hence, many graduates and workers in general, seek from other non-formal educational and professional training providers for guidance and relevant workshops or information to acquire the desired employability skills to amplify their chances to find and/or sustain a job post in their desired line of work.

Since 2020 was a year that changed the face of business almost entirely due to the pandemic and social restriction measures and the world of work has evolved into even more technological –oriented scope. Forbes (2020), published a list with 10 specific employability skills currently trending and desired by the industry for the year 2021:

- Growth Mindset
- Continuous Learning
- Critical Thinking

- Survival Skills
- Resilience
- Flexibility
- Dedication
- Coaching Mindset
- Comfort with Ambiguity
- Thriving in a Virtual Environment

c. Hope and Optimism

Expressing and experiencing positive emotions; such as hope, positive mood, openness, altruism, self-confidence and social connectedness, is directly connected with individual's mental and physical health (Alexander, 2020; Fredrickson, 2001; Tappolet & Rossi, 2015; Lyubomirsky, Sheldon & Schkade, 2005; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004).

Of course, reaching a level of ultimate perfection, whereas a person will not experience any uncomfortable emotions or will not come across any challenging situations is not feasible and utopic. However, with cultivating "hope" and an optimistic mindset and attitude towards life and adversities, the individual will be fully equipped not only to cope through challenging times but also to thrive amidst adversity.

"Hope" [optimism, future – mindedness, future orientation] in positive psychology is defined as the mental mechanism of expecting the best from the future whilst also working towards achieving it. Hence, hope and optimism describe an overall perception that goals can be attained by putting in the hard work and effort. By cultivating hope individuals also boost their internal capacity to endure any possible struggles or invest time and effort and go after their desired goals (Wiles et al., 2008).

Developing and enhancing positivity and positive emotions related abilities of workers can be beneficial for them in multiple ways, personally and professionally. Unemployed individuals experience: higher levels of depression, anxiety and stress, more negative emotions, lower levels of presence of meaning in life (Pezirkianidis et al, 2016). Moreover, based on relevant research unemployment and/or professional – financial uncertainty has been found to be related with low levels of quality of life, self-esteem, resilience and life satisfaction (Deiktakis et al., 2014; Pezirkianidis & Coccosi, 2013). Hence, it is imperative to find solutions and practical applications on how to counterbalance the negative effects of unemployment, support and adequately prepare the professionals for the challenges of a very competitive and skill-specific labour market.

In addition, developing and enhancing positivity increases their job performance, as the concept of positivity was strongly associated with a variety of workplace outcomes. More specifically, people who experience positive emotions at work, seem to have higher levels of engagement in tasks and job performance and are less likely to experience burnout or engage in counterproductive behaviors (Lyubomirsky et al., 2005). Moreover, based on relevant

research, workers who experience more frequently positive emotions are better in decision-making tasks, they are more creative, more productive, build strong relationships and have more efficient interpersonal skills (Cabrera, 2012).

d. Character Strengths

One of the main purposes of Positive Psychology is to encourage and help people identify and develop their character strengths. For this to be achieved, the studies of Peterson and Seligman (2004) have been of high importance. In particular, these studies led to the categorization of Values In Action (VIA) that recognizes 24 character strengths. These character strengths are divided into six broader entities, the virtues. Virtues represent the moral nuclear characteristics of individuals, which are universal and have a biological-evolutionary basis. These virtues prevailed over others as predispositions that are necessary for the survival and wellbeing of human beings. The virtues included in the VIA categorization are wisdom, courage, humanity, justice, restraint, and transcendence. The character strengths are the constituent elements of virtues or, to put it differently, the ways in which the good character is expressed (Macdonald et al., 2008).

Character strengths have a significant impact on the way people think, feel, and behave, causing involvement in positive experiences. Character strengths are the key to being our best selves, and they guide us to do the right thing. They are different from other strengths, such as skills, abilities, interests, and talents, and their application is advantageous to both individuals and society (Peterson & Park, 2006). Cultivating, developing, and applying character strengths in everyday lives leads to experiencing positive emotions (Güsewell & Ruch, 2012) that in turn help individuals experience even more positive emotions, eliminate the unpleasant consequences of negative emotions, broaden their repertoire of thought and behavior and build mental, cognitive, and social resources (Fredrickson, 1998, 2004). These resources are associated with increased levels of psychological resilience which increases when character strengths are applied in practice (Martinez-Marti & Ruch, 2017). Finally, character strengths have a strong connection with happiness and wellbeing (Niemi, 2013). The character strengths that relate to higher levels of wellbeing have been found to be hope, zest, curiosity, love, and gratitude (Hausler et al., 2017; Park et al., 2004).

e. Resilience

Resilience defines “the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors.” (APA). All these challenging situations are naturally part of everyone’s lives, in higher or lower level, and more or less frequently. But the way people deal with them might be quite different, depending on each one’s resilience, adaptability, and coping strategies. This doesn’t most mean that resilient people do not experience emotional distress in face of hard circumstances. Instead, it means they can find the resources and strategies to positively cope with and overcome those stressful situations, while personally growing stronger. So, resilience is not effectively an extraordinary innate capacity, but an essential competence that can be developed and strengthened throughout life. Some protective factors that help building resilience by improving coping skills and adaptability include: i) social support from personal and professional networks; ii) realistic planning, focusing on personal strengths and achievable goals; iii) self-esteem and self-confidence; iv) coping and problem-solving skills; v) communication skills that help people to seek support, mobilise resources and take action; and vi) emotional regulation, to manage negative emotions in face of stressful circumstances.

Some steps to becoming more resilient comprise:

<p>1. Accept change</p> <p>Recognise change is positive and find ways to comfortably deal with it</p>	<p>2. Continuously learn</p> <p>Continuously develop new skills and knowledge, and apply them in face of changes</p>	<p>3. Take charge</p> <p>Assume responsibility for driving your own career and self-development</p>	<p>4. Find your purpose</p> <p>And use this broader perspective to analyse and integrate setbacks</p>
<p>5. Reframe your skills</p> <p>Rebuild how you see your skills, talents, and interests</p>	<p>6. Reflect and integrate</p> <p>To foster learning, new perspectives, and self-awareness</p>	<p>7. Nourish relationships</p> <p>To broaden your personal and professional networks</p>	<p>8. Create balance</p> <p>Value all your life roles, not only the professional one, when developing your self-concept and personal narrative</p>

Adapted from: Center for Creative Leadership

f. Meaning and Purpose

Every person has a unique definition of what a purpose in life is. The feeling that one's life has meaning can come from a number of things; from relationships, from accomplishments, from religious faith, from small experiences, from work (voluntary or paid) and many more. It's not important what gives you purpose, but it is important to find it somewhere. According to Positive Psychology, people seek for meaning, for purpose and for the feeling that their life is worthy. Although it cannot be proved where life's purpose comes from or if it even exists, we do know that humans flourish when they have it and suffer when they do not. Based on research, the feeling that one's life has meaning is associated with a host of positive health outcomes. A recent study of older adults, published in Proceedings of the National Academy of Science, reveals that the sense that one is living a worthwhile life appears to be positively linked to just about every aspect of their lives. "It's not only related to health but to social functions, psychological and emotional experiences, financial stability, well-being and doing different activities (Steptoe).

Viktor Frankl laid the foundation for the research on meaning. He developed three core components:

1. Each individual has a healthy "core".
2. Each individual has the internal resources to "use" their healthy internal core.
3. Life offers each individual purpose and meaning, but it does not owe anyone happiness or fulfilment (Good Therapy, 2015).

He proposed that meaning in life can be discovered in three ways:

1. By creating a work or accomplishing some task.
2. By experiencing something fully or loving somebody.
3. By the attitude that one adopts toward unavoidable suffering (Good Therapy, 2015).

Our sense of purpose in life is constructed through interactions in and out of work. For many, work is a legitimate source of purpose. Work has powerful potential to enrich our lives by providing them with meaning. It can fulfill many of our key drivers of well-being, such as social status, social relations, daily structure and goals. As a result, losing a job or not being able to get one, can cause stress and suffering of mental health. According to a 2014 Gallup Poll, 18% of adults have been treated for depression after remaining unemployed for 27 weeks or longer. In other words, our job status directly affects our mental health. Another major aspect of working is the financial stability of a person. When you juxtapose the facts about the emotional and economic state of people, it's clear that the downfall of one directly affects the other.

It is clear that meaning and purpose are rather unique and hard to explain, but at the same time clear and comprehensible by anyone. We all want and need them in order to succeed in life and live a healthy and happy life. Work is strongly correlated with both terms and it affects some important aspects of our lives. Especially when it comes to adults it can have a big impact.

4. Practical Tips

a. Good practices from research outcomes

In the UK, based on the questionnaires and the focus groups, the aspect that most participants believed needed development was the character traits followed by soft and employability skills. Only 10% of the participants have attended a training seminar or have worked with a counsellor. The participants thought that finding meaning through work, communication, teamwork and self-motivation were the most important factors that needed enrichment in order to be able to apply for jobs easier and be more competitive in the job market that demands these skills.

From the data, it is evident that the participants haven't developed the personal skills needed for a job or haven't asked for a professional's help when applying or searching for a job. This could lead to job applications being rejected, reducing their self-confidence and thus creating negative feelings, affecting their mental health.

Overcome as a project, should create a good practice to tackle these issues. As a good practice, we could develop a seminar based on the soft skills needed for employability, as well as tips from professionals (counsellors) to assist them in this procedure.

The seminar could include activities for building self-confidence, resilience in the work environment, communication and teamwork. These soft skills noted in the questionnaires are important, especially for low-skilled adults that might have faced rejection when looking for a job, not being able to communicate their needs or being excluded from (social) groups. By building up these sets of skills, the participants will be able to feel more confident in their abilities, be able to communicate better with their surroundings, work on their group skills by being a member of a group and find a new meaning through working on something they like.

At the end of the seminar, each country could have a small voluntary position for the participants, in order to put in motion the skills they developed. This will boost their confidence, see what they learnt from the seminar and at the same time be able to learn from possible mistakes in a safe and controlled environment, so when they face a similar situation in a job, they will have previous experience on how to deal with it and the skills needed. In conclusion, this could work as previous work experience, when applying to a job.

In Greece, from the research procedures national level in Greece it was evident that LSAs confused employability skills with positive psychological characteristics, although they referred to both skills as essential for finding and keeping a job. Research revealed that LSAs can acknowledge some core characteristics which fall under the umbrella of positive character strengths in order to find and sustain a job, such as courage and persistence. The focus group revealed that positive characteristics are indeed important to activate when seeking for a job. However, most of the LSAs could not distinguish them from employability

skills, and it was evident they were not familiar with Positive Psychology concepts as such, although they could refer to certain terms. LSAs seemed interested in knowing how to get informed about enhancing their psychological characteristics.

On the contrary, professionals (career counselors/coaches) seemed to be more familiar with some key concepts of Positive Psychology and particular terms. Some professionals also mentioned that they use specific tools to help LSAs identify their own strengths, so the latter be able to use them in their job search efforts.

One such tool is the VIA inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS; Peterson & Seligman, 2004) for the measurement of character in adults (aged 18 and above). The VIA Classification focuses on 24 key character strengths that characterize the positive functioning and social representation of the individual and are divided into six more abstract cultural virtues that are widely valued cross culturally. Based on its results, the respondents can find out their top 5 strengths, which they can put into action in their everyday life.

The tool is available in many languages and versions (e.g. youth) online, and the survey can be taken here for free: <https://www.viacharacter.org/>

In Portugal, research participants have mentioned GIPs' work as a good practice in effectively supporting low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed in Portugal. GIPs are a network of Employment and Professional Integration Sections, geographically dispersed across the whole Portuguese territory, mostly managed by the Municipalities and all working in close articulation with the Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (IEFP). GIPs continuously interact with unemployed and low-skilled adults to help them find and create better personal, social, and economic conditions for themselves and their families. They develop a comprehensive set of activities which include: 1) organise personal interviews with the low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed, to better know about their current circumstances and future needs and wills; 2) manage local networks of community institutions, companies, and VET providers, to find out relevant work, training, and social and economic support opportunities; 3) facilitate information sessions to present adults with

work vacancies and training opportunities, and help them to respond and participate in related selection and recruitment processes; 4) provide low-skilled adults with additional psychosocial support, through specific initiatives that foster the development of concrete soft skills, parental competences, basic economic and family management skills, for example, to reinforce their social integration, and their personal and family well-being. A concrete reference to the application of the WISE model in some interventions held at GIPs was made by counsellors as an added value for the involved adults. WISE interventions draw on social psychology approaches to address social problems and help people flourish, by working on how they make sense of themselves, the others, and their circumstances. This deeper work on personal meaning making processes is more able to prompt effective and relevant changes in one's current circumstances, than it does simple informative and instructional sessions. It usually reinforces a sense of personal empowerment, and fosters individual agency, which is very important to reach long-term positive investments and achievements.

b. Good practices in national level

In the UK, based on the research and the focus group implemented, low-skilled adults (LSAs) face many barriers in a job market that demands both soft and hard skills. In addition, the pandemic of COVID-19 has increased the need for digital skills and literacy. These, in correlation with the increased competition for work have made the LSAs feel more inadequate and pessimistic about the future. Evidence about the future demand for general digital skills for work points at the increasing importance of 21st century skills, particularly interpersonal skills and 'cognitive competencies and learning strategies'.

One good practice to support the LSAs in finding and/or maintain a job is to develop the skills necessary. Evidence suggests that for those already in employment, digital skills can improve an individual's capability and efficiency at work, and lower the risk of job loss due to automation. For those who are unemployed, digital skills can help people to find work and improve their employment prospects. For example, the ability to search and apply for jobs online allows jobseekers to find a wider range of vacancies. Digital skills can allow people to adopt more flexible working arrangements via remote working and distance learning. Around a fifth of the UK population does not have essential digital skills for life as defined by the UK Government.

Approaches to improving digital skills in the UK include education for young people in schools and programmes that take place outside of the education system aimed at upskilling and reskilling adults. There are also initiatives aimed at improving access to digital devices and internet connectivity, which are key barriers to digital skills and inclusion.

In August 2020, the Government launched its Essential Digital Skills Qualifications. These are fully funded qualifications for adults who are inexperienced with digital devices and the internet to develop basic digital skills. As part of its 'Lifetime Skills Guarantee' programme, since April 2021 the Government is offering adults without any A level qualifications or equivalent to undertake a fully funded 'level 3' qualification (equivalent to A level qualifications) from a choice of courses (including some digital-related). Devices and internet connectivity are important for learning and improving digital skills. Several technology loan schemes have been set up by local groups and charities across the UK in recent years, often targeting people vulnerable to digital exclusion. For example, some local libraries run tablet loan schemes, which are often supported with digital skills training. During the pandemic, some organisations have run additional schemes to distribute devices. Everyone Connected (formerly DevicesDotNow), run by a coalition of businesses and charities, has delivered over 13,000 devices to people at risk of digital exclusion. Finally, the Government has committed to improving access to the internet across the UK and in that spirit, the Department for Education has a programme to distribute devices to disadvantaged school pupils and those who cannot access remote education (see COVID-19 and the digital divide).

Cyprus. SUCCESS (Erasmus + Strategic Partnership KA2) – (<https://www.eusuccess.eu/>) The EU Project Aims to use and cultivate Positive Psychology theories and applications in order to teach and/or enhance useful Employability Skills in High School Students. School Counsellors, will be firstly trained on Employability Skills and then impart what they learnt to Lower and Upper Secondary Education Grade Students. The project partners are: Institute of Development Ltd, GrantXpert Consultants Ltd, Hellenic Association of Positive Psychology (HAPPSY, Vilnius University (Lithuania), CESIE (Italy) and ICEP Europe (Ireland).

The main aim of SUCCESS Project was the creation of an innovative Training Package for School Counselors (including a manual, accompanied by hands-on activities, tools and practical exercises) based on Positive Psychology principles that will be applied successfully mainly to support students after they graduate from High School. SUCCESS aims also to enhance School Counselors competencies, by developing an innovative Training Programme for students and/or early school leavers.

The Training Package includes practical tools, activities and exercises to build basic employability skills and positive characteristics that derive from Positive Psychology principles, which have already been applied successfully in educational contexts. All partners worked together to create this Training Package which serves as a pool of collective knowledge and it will be available for all School Counselors - or other professionals with similar expertise - online as a readable or printable manual and on an Online Platform.

Cyprus. LearnGen (Erasmus + Strategic Partnership KA2) – (<https://learngen.eu/about/>) : LearnGen's focus is to combat segregation, discrimination, and social exclusion of marginalized workers. EU Commission communicated in 2017 an inclusion and diversity strategy promoting the inclusion of older staff to equal work opportunities as younger staff.

LearnGen will assist develop skills in both worker groups to teach and learn from each other, making them less vulnerable to professional challenges, resulting in the implementation of innovative practice at the organizational level, specifically by having older workers mentoring youth on skills such as strategic and critical thinking and problem-solving and young workers using reverse mentoring to train older workers to become digitally and media literate.

The project partners are: BRCCI (Bulgaria), FILP (Ireland), MindShift (Portugal), CARDET (Cyprus), Motion Digital (Czech Republic), Institute of Development CY (Cyprus), SVEB (Switzerland).

In Greece, one of the basic needs of LSAs that arose from the research procedures at National level was their lack of access to information regarding training and education, but also job advertisements. However, the Greek National Organisation of Human Potential Employment (OAED) has already launched an online application (called “myOAEDlive”) that users can download for free, and allows them to get informed about new training programmes for unemployed and LSAs among other groups of people that are job seekers. Through this application individuals can book an online appointment with a career counsellor, and navigate the platform for updates.

Also, there are some Erasmus+ EU funded projects that aim at the inclusion of LSAs and unemployed in the labour market. One of them is EAGLES project is an ERASMUS+ program aim to tackle the youth unemployment problem by developing important Employability Skills of young job seekers in combination with Positive Emotions, Psychological Resilience, Optimism and Self-esteem. Building Alternative Skills Innovative sChemes-BASIC (www.easibasic.gr) and ACT45 (act45.eu) are two EU projects that aim at upgrading the assessment procedures, and offer flexible and adapted training programmes, as well as the reinforcement of certification of new skills. The first one empowers adults in acquiring new basic skills (literacy, numeracy and digital skills), while the second one is aimed at suggesting alternative ways to upskill low skilled adults over the age of 45.

All the above converge to the fact that LSAs need to build a more solid network which will be able to support them in a practical way, and let information flow so they can all access it and reach it. One good practice would be to enhance their digital skills to offer them more chances of accessing online platforms, social media, as well as the governmental services.

In Portugal, as one of the major challenges concerning social and labour integration of low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed in Portugal is their low education and professional qualifications and skills, the national upskilling and reskilling strategy should be highlighted as a good practice. The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) structures and regulates the whole training and certification offer for youth and adults, below EQF level 6, sustained by the National Qualifications Catalogue (CNQ). Some remarks on the good practices related to this national strategy implementation are:

- The CNQ is continuously revised and updated to respond to current adults' upskilling and reskilling needs and opportunities in face of the changing labour market situation, also considering regional specificities – now including and strengthening training offer on digital skills, remote work dynamics, foreign languages, for example
- Diverse formal and non-formal education and training offer is made available to better fit diverse adults' needs and possibilities – short modular training courses, educational courses, vocational courses and dual certification ones (both including on-job training), processes of recognition, validation and accreditation of education and/or professional competences acquired and developed through formal, non-formal and informal learning, enabling both basic or secondary education certification and a huge set of professional certifications
- Qualifica Centres act locally, developing effective networks of stakeholders, recognising specific local needs (from both companies and individuals' perspectives), and supporting adults identifying and applying for the education and training opportunities that better fit their needs and circumstances – recognising existing competences and guiding them to relevant learning paths that could help not only to improve their qualifications, but also provide them with more opportunities to fulfil their potential and (re)join the workforce

In Ireland, since 2011, the [Springboard+](#) Initiative has provided upskilling and reskilling opportunities to support Irish adults in successfully integrating and finding sustainable employment in the competitive Irish labour market. Springboard+ offers a wide range of free,

or heavily subsidised higher education courses to adults who are unemployed, self-employed, as well as to recent graduates or adults in vulnerable employments.

The Springboard + Initiative has identified the key knowledge and skills deficiencies which exist in the Irish labour market, and as of 2021, is providing 321 courses with 11,259 places available to learners in Irish Higher Educational Institutes (Springboard Courses, 2021). Courses offered by the Springboard+ Initiative are mostly part-time in their nature and upon completion, award the learner with a qualification on the National Qualifications Framework between Certificate Level (NFQ Level 6) and Masters' Level (NFQ Level 9).

Springboard+ supports the needs and demands of emerging and expanding sectors, including Construction and Engineering, Hospitality, Information Technology, International Financial Services, Language Support, Pharmaceuticals and provides companies and employers with highly qualified and job ready adults who are able to meet the growing demands of these industries to support their continued growth in the Irish market.

Further information on the Springboard+ Initiative in Ireland can be found by visiting their website: <https://springboardcourses.ie/>

In Ireland also, Job Clubs is a free and confidential employment service provided by the Department of Social Protection to support all unemployed persons who are aged over 18 years of age and actively seeking employment. The Job Club Service provides 'job ready individuals' – those who have the necessary training, education and motivation to pursue work in the open labour market (Department of Social Protection, 2020) - with the opportunity to take positive steps towards their employment goals. Often short term in its nature (1 – 4 weeks), adult job seekers are provided with opportunities to 'drop-into' offices to explore employment opportunities in their areas. Support can be extended after this duration should it still be needed.

Jobs Club provides training and advice to support job seekers in planning for employment, seeking employment opportunities and securing employment. A wide range of support is provided to job seekers in the following areas; (1) CV Development; (2) Cover Letter

Development; (3) CV & Job Specifications Reviews; (4) Interviewing Skills, including Mock Interviews; (5) Peer Group Interviews; (6) Communication Skills; (7) Sourcing and Approaching Referees; (8) Transferable Skills; and (9) Information on the Current Labour Market (Department of Social Protection, 2020).

By engaging with the Jobs Club, jobseekers gain awareness into their personal skills and attributes which can support them in maintaining employment. In addition to supporting the job seeker, the Job Clubs support local enterprises to access free recruitment services and are facilitated and supported in their search to find a local workforce. The website, Jobs Ireland, has been developed to support employers and jobseekers to connect with one another.

More information on Job Clubs across Ireland can be found here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/collection/997db6-job-club-locations/>

5. Self-Assessment

a. Checklist / Questionnaire

General instruction

Use this checklist to reflect on your feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and capacities. Read each statement and check it (x) if your answer to it would be “yes, most of the time”. Respond as sincerely as possible and based on your personal experience. The results are only meant to help you become aware of and think about your feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and capacities.

Statements for Employability Skills

I am aware of my employability skills, I apply them in my daily professional life, and I try to develop them further.

I am aware of my employability skills but I do not apply them in my daily professional life, and I do not try to develop them further.

I am not aware of my employability skills.

Statements for Character Strengths

I am aware of my core character strengths, I apply them in my daily personal and professional life, and I try to develop them further.

I am aware of my core character strengths but I do not apply them in my daily personal and professional life, and I do not try to develop them further.

I am not aware of my core character strengths.

Statements for Resilience

I trust my own capacity to solve challenging situations in my life.

I request others' support whenever I feel I need it, or it might be useful for me.

I believe the way I see a challenge or adversity impacts its resolution and related outcomes.

Statements for Meaning and Purpose

I have a sense of meaning and/or purpose in my life.

The sense of meaning/purpose keeps me motivated to keep getting better.

Without a sense of meaning/purpose, I feel at loss.

Statements Hope and Optimism

I have a sense of hope and/or optimism in my life.

The sense of hope/optimism keeps me motivated to keep getting better.

Without a sense of hope/optimism, I feel desperate.

Final instruction

This checklist invites you to think about your feelings, thoughts, behaviours, and capacities. They may change throughout time, depending upon a combination of personal and contextual dimensions. But you can try to develop those that are more relevant to you in a more consistent way. When you have completed the checklist, review your answers, paying

particular attention to the statements you did not check. Read them again and think about what you could do or change if you would like to also check them in the following assessment.

b. Positive Psychology Practical Application

The Strengths Wheel

Every individual has its own signature traits, characteristics and strengths. However, it is argued that many people might not be aware of the strengths they possess. Moreover, having that innate attribute or mastered skill is not set on stone. Each person can enhance his or her own strengths as well as develop new ones (Biswas-Diener, Kashdan, & Minhas, 2011), much like a muscle if not used strengths may wither (Jones-Smith, 2011).

METHOD:

- **Material:** A copy of “Strengths Wheel” Appendix (provided below)
- **Duration:** 30 – 45 minutes

STEP 1: Choose your 5 signature strengths, which, in your opinion will be very important in your progress in aspects of your life.

STEP 2: Using the Strengths wheel, indicate the extent to which you currently use your strengths in your everyday life at work, hobbies, home and family or with friends.

STEP 3: After identifying, the strengths try to reflect and investigate if there is room to use the strengths more often.

STEP 4: Use the Strengths Wheel (Appendix) can be used to make a graphical representation of the extent to which strengths are used (current use) and the room that exists to use the strengths more (scope).

- The centre of the circle represents a score of ‘0’ and the outer rim a score of ‘10’.

STEP 5: Place two marks in each segment of the circle indicating:

- (1) to what extent you currently use that strength in your everyday life; and
- (2) how much room there is for using that strength more

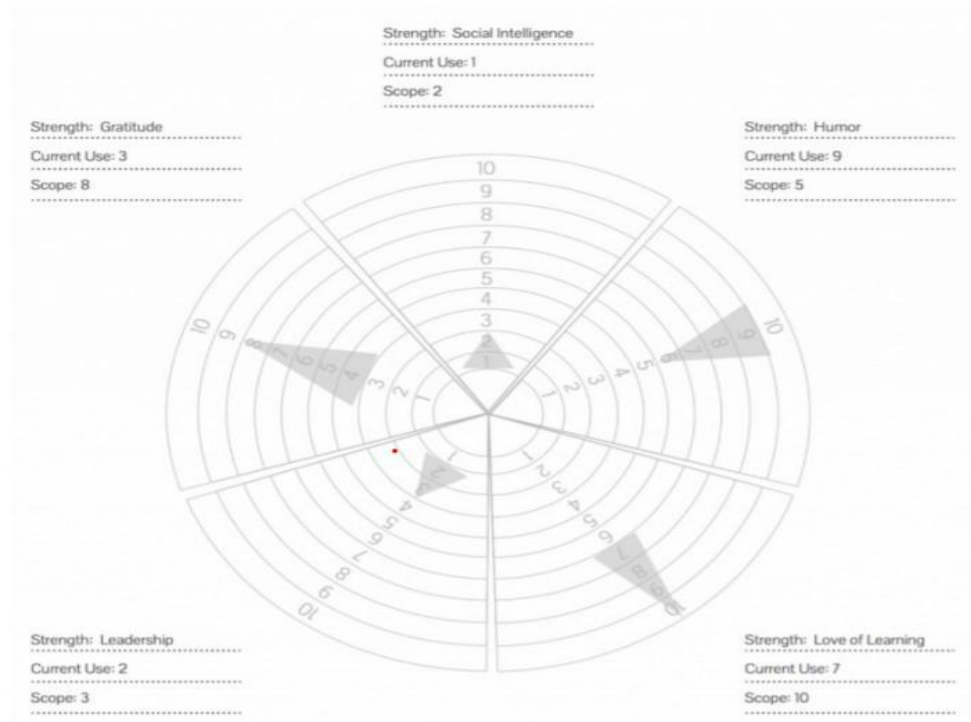
STEP 6: Draw a triangle that connects the two marks.

- The bigger the gap between the current use and the scope, the bigger the triangle should be and the more potential there is for using that strength more.

FINAL STEP is to explore ways to optimise strength use!

Reflection

- What do you notice when you take a look at the graph? Any prominent imbalances perhaps?
- How would you consider your strengths to be useful in any given important context of your life? (Parenting, family, partner, professional, citizenship)
- Which strengths could be used more?
- Which strengths leave little or no room for expansion?
- What could you do to start using your strengths more?
- What could you do to improve your strengths and how?



For more info on “Strengths Wheel”:

Positive Psychology practitioner’s tools. In:

<https://positivepsychologyprogram.com/toolkit/wp-content/uploads/The-Strengths-Wheel.pdf>

Matt Driver. <http://mattdriverconsulting.com>

Driver, M. (2011). Coaching Positively – Lessons for coaches from Positive Psychology. Maidenhead: Open University Press /McGraw Hill

6. Employability Guides & Support

a. Employability Guides Examples

An Employability Guide should include all the necessary information for the low-skilled adults (LSAs) when they are trying to find a new job, or retain one. It will include all the basic steps they need to follow in order to apply successfully for a job and the next steps regarding their interview.

The first step should be the creation of their Curriculum Vitae (CV). The guide should include some steps and tips for the CV structuring.

Example

A CV is the first impression the employer gets for the employee and it should include the LSAs core skills, their experience, their education and qualifications. Optional: a paragraph to grab the recruiter's attention or a cover letter, hobbies and interests. Some points should be the layout of the CV to be clear and precise, to fill the information in chronological order, to include personal contact information, to have available references and to be short (no longer than two pages).

After that, the guide should provide some sites with job offerings or information and guidance on how to search for a job. It should include some steps and guidance since most of the beneficiaries probably don't have experience with job hunting online and required digital skills to upload their CV to a platform. It could have a video demonstration on how to search (keywords) and the basic points the LSAs should look at before applying for the job.

After the job application the next step is the communication with the company interested in the person's CV. Usually there might be a phone screening of the participant from the recruiter. To make sure the beneficiaries don't get anxious about it, the guide should explain why this happens and what they should expect from it. This is in order to check the participant's skills such as communication, interest and attitude. The interested person should be polite and ready to answer any questions regarding their CV – for example if there is a gap between jobs or why you left your previous one or if they need any clarifications regarding the CV etc.). This way they will be prepared for what might occur.

The next step should be the interview. Tips on how one should dress, what to have with them, what questions to expect and how to respond to them, and what questions to ask, among others. The guide can also include some questions in order for the applicant to be prepared and not be caught off guard. It needs to be noted that since the pandemic, a great deal of interviews is being held online. The guide should include this as an option as well and help people looking to work, prepare for this occasion. They might be asked to log in to a certain platform, so the guide should include the usual platforms and how to conduct a meeting on them (e.g., Zoom, Skype, Google Meet, Microsoft etc.).

Moving on, the guide can also include some opportunities for volunteering in order to assist adults in building up their resume and their self-confidence, as well as some tips on finding

the right experience for them, by shadowing or attending seminars/programmes. In addition, it should also include some guidance on how to network, since it is rather important and it can create lots of opportunities especially during job hunting. Networks are able to provide advice about career development, find new job roles or build relationships with people who might become future employers.

In conclusion, the guide should cover some of the skills that can improve employability and how to develop them, such as communication, numeracy, problem solving, working under pressure, teamwork, adaptability and organisational skills.

How to prepare for interview

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a seismic shift from in-person, face-to-face interviews towards online and telephone interviews. Employers are able to access talent from all over the world conducting interviews in many different ways.

When preparing a Low Skilled Adult for an interview, it is important to remember some of the most basic guiding principles:

- 1) Preparation: Being prepared for an interview is crucial to helping a Low Skilled Adult (LSA) to find employment. Being ill-prepared for an interview may act as a sign that an adult is unenthusiastic about the role they are interviewing for. The STAR method – Situation, Task, Action, Result – is an excellent tool that enables LSA to excel in their interviews.
- 2) Punctuality: Whether face-to-face or online, it is important for the interviewee to ensure that they are on time for their interview. Through a range of time management strategies, including scheduling and delegation, the individual can be supported in improving their punctuality skills to succeed in the workplace.
- 3) Presentation: Verbal and non-verbal communication are crucial to the overall success of a Low Skilled Adult in performing well at an interview. Answering the wrong questions, poor eye contact, a lack of confidence and fidgeting are often examples of a disengaged adult. Low Skilled Adults should be encouraged to practice smiling, uncrossing their arms and being mindful of their posture and pose when conducting an interview.

With access to talent at an all time high for business, it is important to guide and support Low Skilled Adults to acknowledge their own strengths and abilities so that they can succeed in interviews.

b. Available Support for unemployed / LSAs / career guidance in each country

In Cyprus, there is no comprehensive strategy, especially designed to address the challenges and needs of low-skilled adults in particular. The National Lifelong Learning Strategy (2014-2020) which is a broader spectrum that covers National Adult Education needs and priorities also offers options that can apply to low skilled adults as well. As outlined in the Strategy, the four priority axes are:

- Promotion of access and participation in Lifelong Learning Programmes for all and recognition of learning outcomes
- Improvement of the quality and efficiency of education and training
- Promotion of research and development for the support of Lifelong Learning
- Promotion of employability (toward integration/reintegration into the labour market).

Regarding enhancing basic skills (language and ICT Competencies) AECs, State Institutes of Further Education (SIFE) and the Open Schools (OS), all state funded, offer ICT training and Greek language lessons for repatriated Cypriot, foreigners, asylum seekers and illiterates. Moreover, for vocational qualifications evening Gymnasiums-Lyceums provide secondary general education to adults and younger (16+) early school leavers. Currently, this is the sole educational pathway providing an opportunity for completion of secondary education to early school leavers (Cedefop, 2019).

Cyprus's Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports and Youth, also runs two non-formal education programmes: Adult Education Centres that provide courses with no official certification in various areas, and State Institutes of Further Education that offer courses mainly in ICT, accounting, languages as preparatory lessons for the official examinations of external stakeholders (e.g. IELTS or IGCSE of Cambridge, ECDL or ICT Europe for Computers etc.).

In Greece, 2010 was the first time that a holistic strategy on lifelong learning (LLL) was typically put in force in Greece in order to empower -among others- low skilled adults, as the National Network for Lifelong Learning (NNLL) was established aiming to bring together all LLL governing bodies (e.g., the General Secretariat for Vocational Education, Training and Lifelong Learning, the National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance-EOPPEP etc.) and LLL service providers (e.g., bodies offering counselling and/or career guidance services). The National Network for Lifelong Learning has developed several practices in order to investigate low skilled adults' needs, promote vocational training,

and facilitate their entrance or maintenance in the labour market. In particular, its basic functions include initial vocational training, continuing vocational training, and general adult education, while its supporting functions include provision of lifelong counselling and career guidance services, recognition of qualifications, and certification of knowledge, skills and competences (EURYDICE, 2021).

In Portugal, a strong and long-term National Programme is being implemented with the aim of upskilling and qualifying low-skilled adults, by providing them with the diverse formal and non-formal learning opportunities referred (*e.g.* educational and/or vocational qualifications, specific skills development, recognition, validation, and certification of competences). Qualifica Centres created within the framework of that programme play a crucial role in recognising low skilled adults' existing competences and guiding them to relevant learning paths that could help not only to improve their qualifications, but also provide them with more opportunities to fulfil their potential and (re)join the workforce (OECD, 2019). Besides that, the Public Employment and Vocational Training Service (IEFP) also supports low-skilled adults through a network of Employment Centres and Professional Integration Sections (GIPs) that present those adults with work vacancies and training opportunities and help them to respond and participate in related selection and recruitment processes (*e.g.*, design CVs, fill in job applications, prepare for job interviews). GIPs usually provide low-skilled adults with additional psychosocial support as well, through specific initiatives that foster the development of concrete soft skills, parental competences, basic economic and family management skills, for instance, to reinforce their social integration, and their personal and family well-being. Although diverse kinds of responses are available to support low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed, most of them rely on information and instructional strategies that professionals consider not truly life-changing for this target audience. Career guidance services should then be generalised and redesigned in such a way that provide low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed with effective opportunities to take agency over their circumstances with a sense of meaning and purpose. This means, an investment on coaching activities is needed to complement all informative and instructional actions that are

currently implemented as part of career guidance provided to low-skilled adults and long-term unemployed.

In Ireland, a wide range of tools and career guidance supports exist for Low Skilled Adults and Unemployed Adults in Ireland, including Intreo; INOU; and the Adult Education Guidance and Information Services.

[Intreo](#), the Irish Public Employment Services, support adults of working age to connect to secure employment throughout Ireland. Intreo provides adults, including those in receipt of International Protection, on Social Welfare payments and those who are interested in becoming self-employed, with a wide range of services to support them to prepare for, and find work. Intreo provides adults with the necessary support and services to upskill and retrain so that they can be connected with employers who are hiring in their areas.

[The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed](#) (INOUE) supports unemployed adults to live a life free from poverty and social exclusion. The INOUE provides information and advocacy services to unemployed people across Ireland (INOUE, 2021) to enable them to proactively reengage with the labour market. The INOUE offers a wide range of QQI accredited Training and Development opportunities, including the [Building Futures Programme](#) and the [Shaping Futures Programme](#), to support Low Skilled Adults to learn the skills needed to succeed in the labour market.

The Adult Educational Guidance Services (AEGS) offers free and confidential information and guidance to adults who wish to continue their education or access the labour market. Adults are provided with information on how to access Training and Development opportunities in their local areas and receive information on funding opportunities that are available to them.

7. Material Addressing the PsyCap of LSAs

Psychological capital consists of individual characteristics and qualities that promote the expression of positive personal resources and talents that contribute to individuals' ability to deal with adversities in every-day life (Santisi et al., 2020). PsyCap is comprised of four dimensions: hope, self-efficacy, resilience, and optimism (Luthans et al., 2007) and addresses proactive action, trusting in one's potential, and holding a positive outlook for the future.

Individuals with higher scores on PsyCap perform better compared to those with lower scores due to their ability to draw upon more personal resources to pursue and attain their goals (Luthans et al., 2007). PsyCap can be cultivated through interventions and training (Luthans et al., 2008), thus being a useful and valuable construct that can contribute to individual well-being and organizational flourishing.

The Psychological Capital Questionnaire (PCQ) is the most common measure of PsyCap (Dawkins et al., 2013). LSAs could be benefitted by completing the scale themselves to see whether they need to work on their PsyCap and develop the four psychological constructs as personal resources.

Psychological Capital Scale*

Below there are 24 statements about you. Using the following scale (from 1 = completely disagree, to 6 = completely agree), please indicate your level of agreement or disagreement. Add up your score on the 24 items. The higher scores indicate an enhanced PsyCap.

1	In this job, things never work out the way I want them to.	6	5	4	3	2	1
2	At this time, I am meeting the goals that I have set for myself.	1	2	3	4	5	6
3	I feel confident presenting information to a group of colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5	6
4	I feel confident helping to set targets/goals in my work area.	1	2	3	4	5	6
5	I can get through difficult times at work because I've experienced difficulty before.	1	2	3	4	5	6
6	There are lots of ways around any problem.	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	I usually take stressful things at work in stride.	1	2	3	4	5	6
8	When I have a setback at work, I have trouble recovering from it and moving on.	6	5	4	3	2	1
9	When things are uncertain for me at work I usually expect the best.	1	2	3	4	5	6
10	I can be "on my own" so to speak at work if I have to.	1	2	3	4	5	6
11	If something can go wrong for me work-wise it will.	6	5	4	3	2	1
12	If I should find myself in a jam, I could think of ways to get out of it.	1	2	3	4	5	6
13	I feel I can handle many things at a time at this job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
14	I always look on the bright side of things regarding my job.	1	2	3	4	5	6
15	I feel confident contributing to discussions about the company's strategy.	1	2	3	4	5	6

16	I feel confident analyzing a long-term problem to find a solution.	1	2	3	4	5	6
17	Right now, I see myself as being pretty successful at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
18	I'm always optimistic about my future.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19	I approach this job as if "every cloud has a silver lining".	1	2	3	4	5	6
20	At the present time, I am energetically pursuing my work goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21	I feel confident contributing to discussions about the company's strategy.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22	I usually manage difficulties one way or another at work.	1	2	3	4	5	6
23	I feel confident contacting people outside the company (e.g., suppliers, customers) to discuss problems.	1	2	3	4	5	6
24	I can think of many ways to reach my current work goals.	1	2	3	4	5	6

* available in Çetin, F., & Basim, H. N. (2012). Organizational psychological capital: A scale adaptation study. *Amme Idaresi Dergisi*, 45(1), 159-179.

8. Conclusions

In conclusion, the unemployment levels the past few years have been high, and with the COVID-19 pandemic, these levels rose. It is now harder for people to find or maintain a job, especially for people with lower skills. OVERCOME project aims to assist these adults by enhancing their competencies and support their inclusion in the labor market and society. Additionally, it will enhance the skills of career counsellors and adult educators to better support low-skilled adults by training them with educational material created for this purpose. The OVERCOME toolkit is designed to improve the employability skills and the psychological capacities of the low-skilled adults, as well as ways to deal with the process of obtaining or maintaining a job. The OVERCOME toolkit includes summaries of key concepts (low-skilled adults / unemployed, employability skills, hope and optimism, resilience, character strengths, meaning and purpose), practical strategies and tips, self-assessment, employability guides and support, and material addressing the psychological capital of low-skilled adults. The toolkit will be adapted based on each country needs and condition.

Each of the participating countries (UK, Greece, Ireland, Cyprus, Portugal and Switzerland) have presented a number of practical tips (good practices based on research and good practices applied in national level) that can be implemented to assist the beneficiaries. Additionally, a self-assessment questionnaire and a practical application based on Positive Psychology are provided to help the participants recognise their strengths and their weaknesses and how they can improve themselves. Last but not least, an Employability Guide example is provided in order to cover the fundamental steps for applying for a job as well as support available in each participating country for the participants.

OVERCOME project covers all the fundamental steps and gives access to materials that can assist low-skilled adults by making them more competitive and more competent in the job market.

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