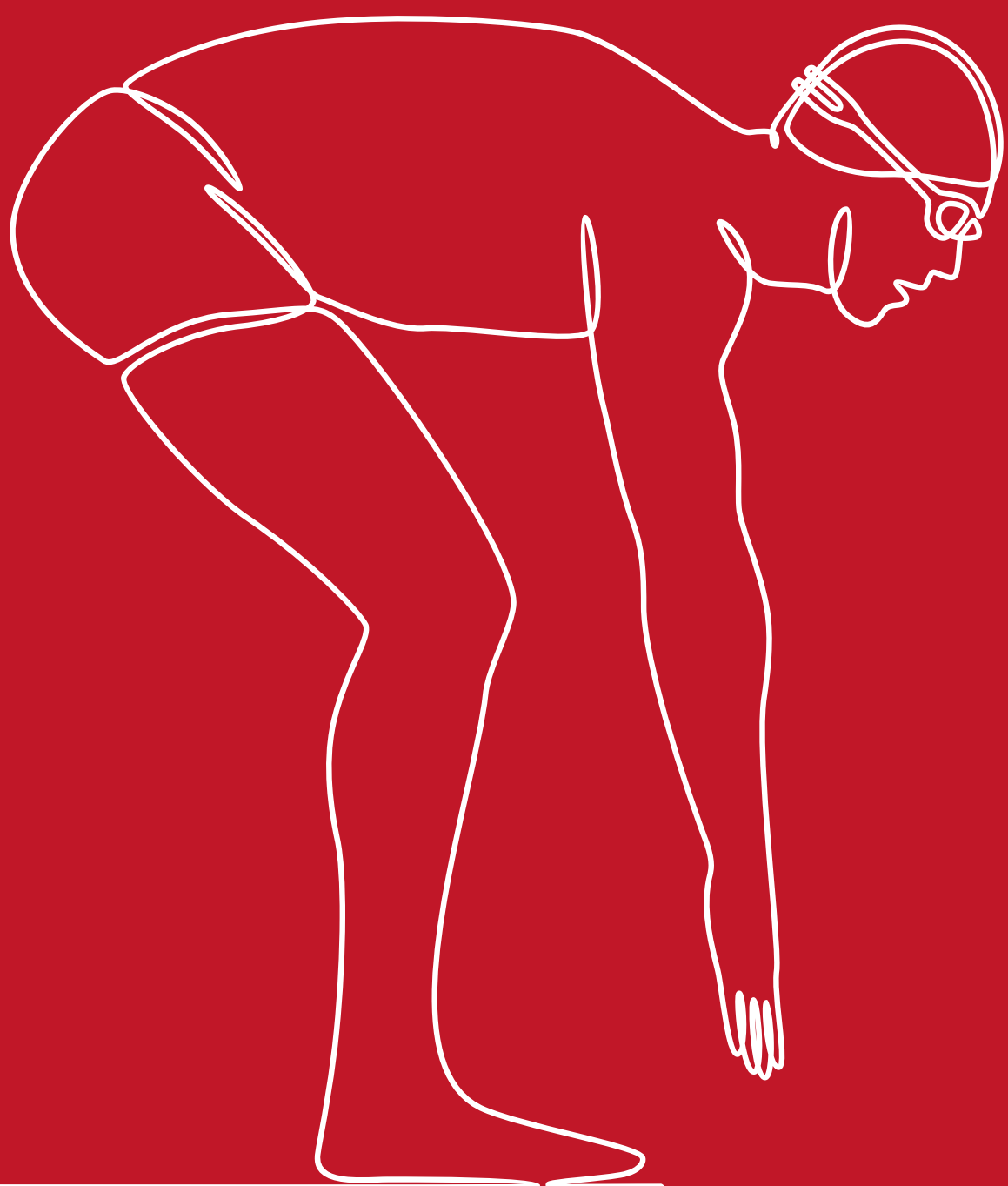




POSITION PAPER

RECOGNITION AND VALIDATION OF SKILLS FOR YOUTH GAINED THROUGH SPORTS

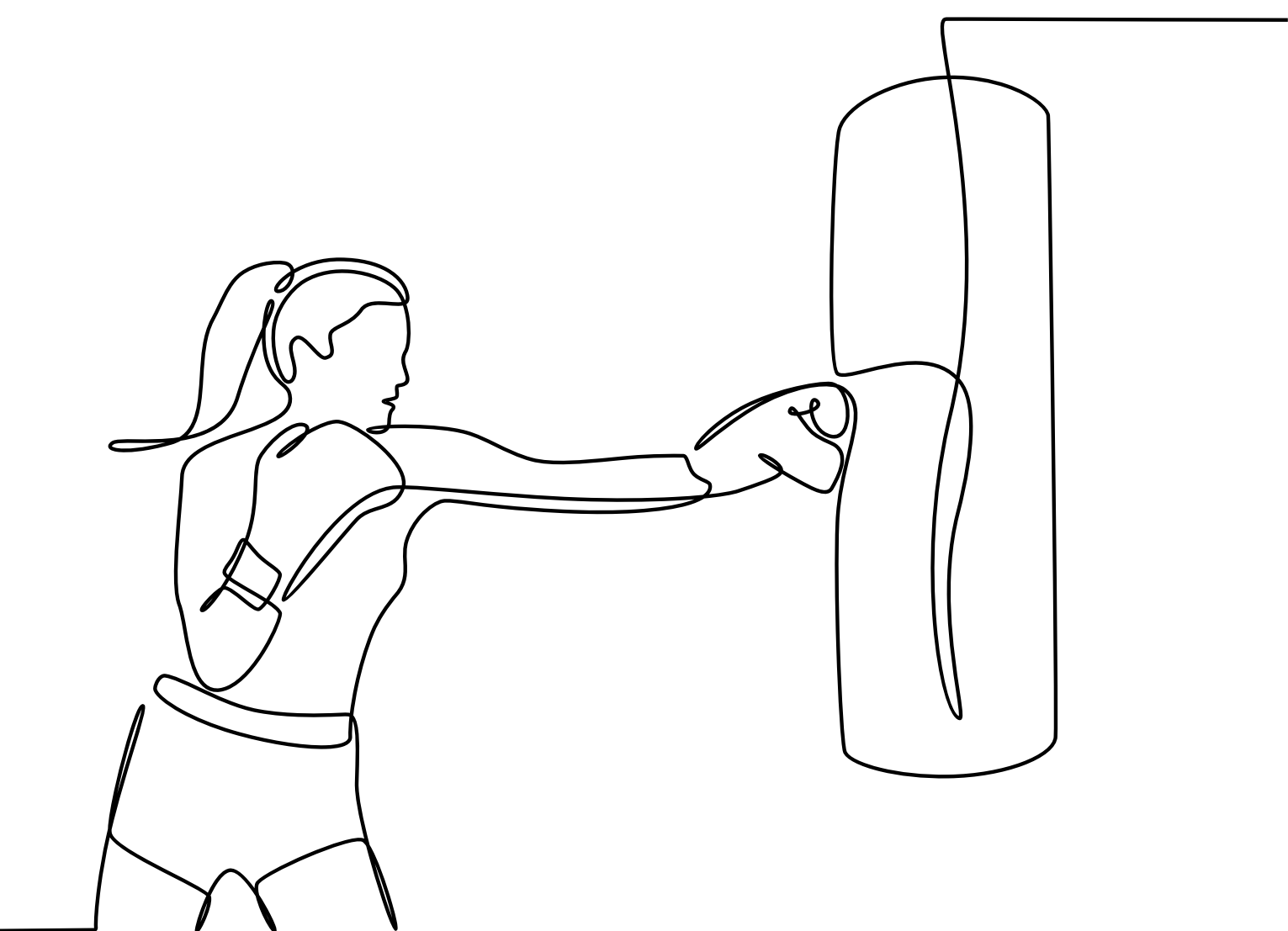
4 QUALITY
EDUCATION



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Education, as a lifelong process, enables the continuous development of a person's capabilities as an individual and as a member of society, and can take different forms. Beside formal education, self-regulated learning, context-bound learning, lifelong learning, informal learning and non-formal learning became basic elements of education.

The sport sector and the learning that happens by practicing sports can be placed under the informal and non-formal education spectrums. The methods used within sports are very diverse and are mainly based on creating healthy environments of trust and sharing experiences, leadership, communication and problem-solving. By practicing sports, the competences gained provide added value for young people, for the economy and society in terms of capacity building of clubs, organizations, systems and institutions. This education takes place in a diverse range of environments and addresses specific target groups and subjects, facilitating the inclusion of young people with fewer opportunities.



The sport sector has a great impact on all levels within Europe. More than 7 million people work in sport-related jobs, and sport-related goods and services amount to nearly 3% of total EU gross value added. Since 2009, with the Lisbon Treaty, the EU has a clear mandate to develop and implement an EU-coordinated sports policy supported by a specific budget. Within the EU competence to work with sports, it is clarified that it can support, coordinate or complement sports policy measures taken by national governments, without adopting any legally binding measures. Still, even within these EU competences, we as ENGSO Youth believe in the transversal role that sports plays, and believe that there can be more done, especially when we look at sports as a tool for development of young people's competences.

BACKGROUND

In 2020, the European Commission published a new package of policy initiatives, the so-called [Updated Skills Agenda](#) accompanied by a [Study supporting the evaluation of the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#). The document assesses the implementation of the [Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning](#) (NFIL) from 2012.

The aforementioned Council Recommendation requires the Member States to support individuals when validating their skills for further learning and career development. The European Commission differentiates between formal (e.g. institutional education and training programmes), non-formal (e.g. in-company training) and informal (e.g. work and life experience) learning, from a lifelong learning perspective. According to the Council Recommendation "(i) validation means a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: 1. Identification through dialogue of particular experiences of an individual; 2. Documentation to make visible the individual's experiences; 3. a formal assessment of these experiences; and 4. Certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification; and (j) recognition of prior learning means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation."[[]

Within the whole process, including the Council Recommendation and its Evaluation study, we have failed to see the role of sports being acknowledged. Although sports is widely recognized as an important tool in the personal, social and professional development of young people, which was also confirmed within our projects, often when evaluating and discussing youth and education policies, the sport dimension is left out. This is evident within the good practices identified in the ["Skills for You\(th\) through Sport HANDBOOK"](#) (see more information below).

Following the outcomes of the evaluation of the Council Recommendation on the validation of non-formal and informal learning, and the results of the processes that were implemented by ENGSO Youth, we want to contribute to the work done and introduce the sport dimension through this position paper.

What has ENGSO Youth done so far?

ENGSO Youth has a long-lasting history working on the themes of employment and education of young people. Education and employability in and through sport are one of our main focuses, where we work to ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities. By doing so we focus on promoting sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for youth within the grassroots sport sector. This position paper revolves around the outcomes of two projects supported by the Erasmus+ on which ENGSO Youth, "Skills for You(th) through Sport (SK4YS)" and "Monitoring and Evaluation Manual for Sport-for-Employability Programmes (MONITOR)".

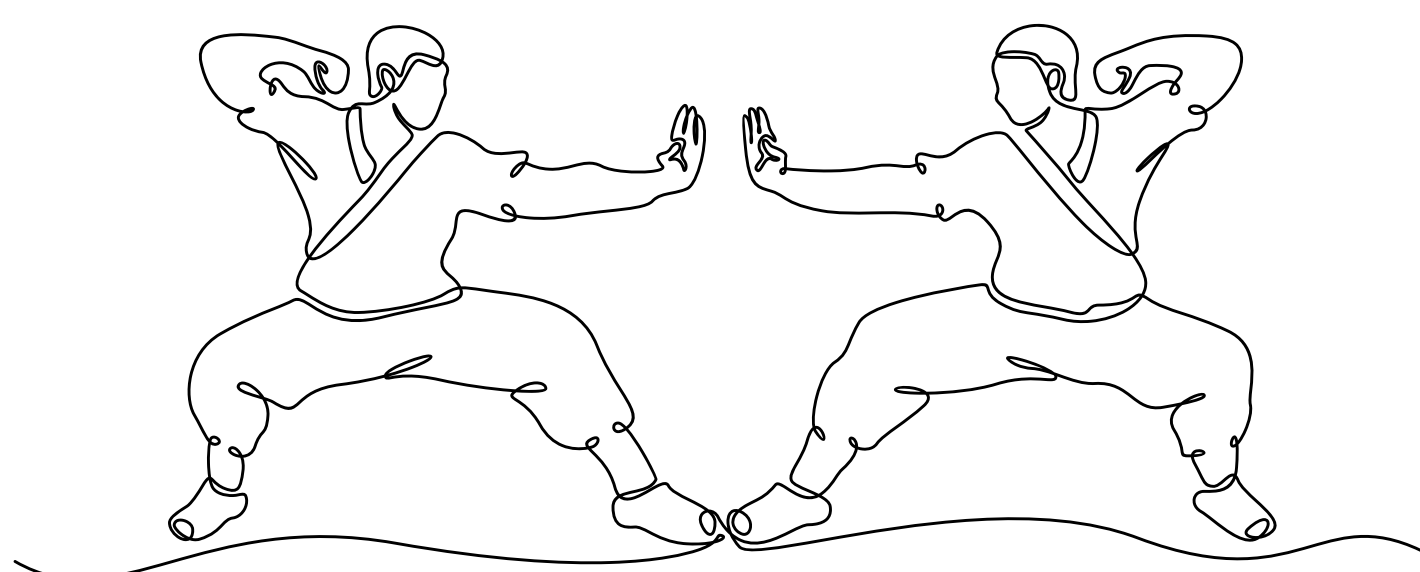
Skills for You(th) through Sport, known as the SK4YS project is a transnational initiative gathering various stakeholders with interest in skills development in and through sport. The initiative has been designed to raise awareness on soft skills and competencies gained through sport and to build the capacity of sport and youth organisations to implement sport-based youth development programmes. Additionally, the project aimed to increase recognition of transferable skills that sport can develop for young people, thus the position paper.

The "Monitoring and Evaluation Manual for Sport-for-Employability Programmes (MONITOR)" project has implemented an Employability Study's recommendations and developed a manual to enable (starting) youth-sport employability and education organisations to undertake systematic Monitoring and Evaluation, developing policy guidelines for employability sector on recognition of skills developed through sports. Following the discussions within the project implementation, and inspired from the developed [manual](#), we have confirmed the success of many sport programs for employability.

SPORTS CONTRIBUTION TO SKILLS DEVELOPMENT AND EMPLOYABILITY

Following the results of the SK4YS and MONITOR projects, it is evident that sport and physical activities have a direct link with skills and competences development and therefore with employability. As already concluded within the "Skills for You(th) through Sport HANDBOOK", Youth sport is a popular and valued social activity and adolescents are generally motivated to engage in physical activity regardless of their social status and economic situation. Participation in organised sports represents a unique opportunity for young people to develop transversal skills, whereas the social network gained through participation in sports can positively influence their future employment opportunities. Sport can enhance competencies and skills that are necessary for successfully dealing with the complex realities of life. Therefore, young people with improved soft skills and enhanced goal setting, problem solving, and positive-thinking abilities are more likely to achieve a smooth transition from the school environment to employment and benefit from a successful career. It is important to mention that sport practice in itself is only one component to enhance transversal skills, but other aspects of sport can contribute to personal development. As an example, an important aspect of sport is volunteering. Volunteering in sports can contribute to people's personal development as a step to a paid job. By volunteering, people can develop general/transversal skills and competences (e.g. working in teams, conflict resolution, flexibility, problem-solving), specific job skills (depending on the kind of voluntary work), and so called employee skills. Additionally, through volunteering many young people have the chance to network with other stakeholders within the sport and other sectors, which provides additional opportunities and motivation.

In sport practice, soft skills are similar to physical skills in the way they are learned, through demonstration and regular engagement in sport and physical activities. Soft skills gained through sport are strong and generally sustainable, they are transversal which means that young people can take advantage of these skills in other activities or sectors. There are various skills that sport and sport-based programmes can develop, depending on several aspects such as the sport utilized and the applied educational method. It is extremely difficult to list them all but it is possible to classify them into different categories. Hence, such competences and soft skills are:



- behavioral (communicating effectively, having a high level of motivation, leadership, etc.);
- cognitive (making effective decisions, having a strategic vision, etc.);
- interpersonal (working with people from different backgrounds, conflict management, group cohesion, etc.);
- intrapersonal (being self-aware, abnegation, surpassing oneself, etc.).

Some of the common answers to the question “which transversal skills can be developed through sport?” are the abilities to perform under pressure, solve problems, meet deadlines and/or challenges, set goals, communicate, handle both success and failure, work in a team and within a system, and receive feedback and benefit from it.

Transversal skills are general skills that are context and content free. They can be acquired through sports and can be applied to other areas of participants’ life and to other non-sport careers.

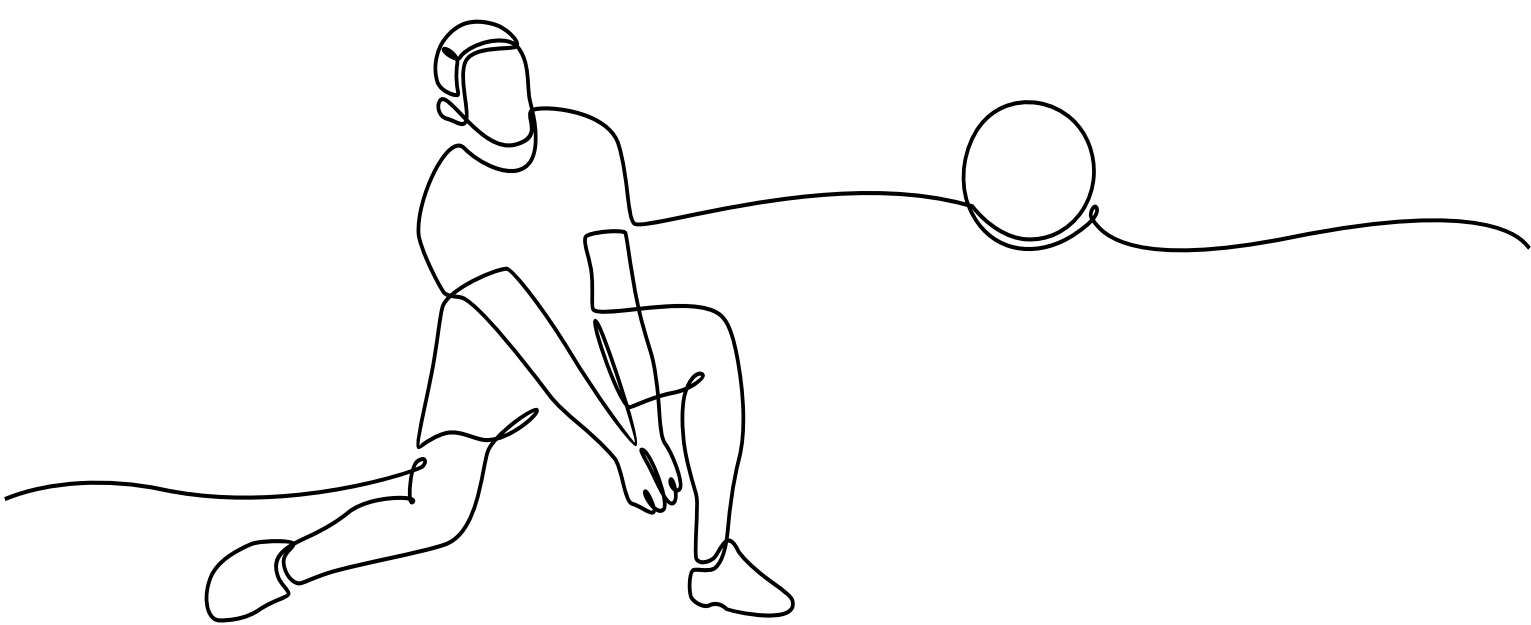
In general, transversal skills enable youth to succeed in different environments and are therefore extremely useful in the labour market. Young people involved in organised sports are able to learn a wide range of soft skills that benefit their physical, social, affective and cognitive development.

With this position paper we want to ask the question: how do we assess, validate and recognize these competences that are gained by the young people through sports, so they can be presented within the labor market?

Therefore, we recommend:

THE EUROPEAN STAKEHOLDERS TO:

- Promote a higher value of skills, competences and qualifications achieved via sports, so that they can be seen as comparable qualifications or valid in their own right
- Set up and promote common validation tools and guidelines on European level, following the four main phases of validation of competences:
 - *Identification of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through sports;*
 - *Documentation of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through sports;*
 - *Assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through sports;*
 - *Certification of the results of the assessment of an individual’s learning outcomes acquired through sports in the form of a qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.’*
- encourage sport organisations and federations, as well as public bodies to use comparable and transparent instruments for recognising the competencies gained



through sports, by developing a commonly recognized assessment qualification framework

- encourage the development of pathways, by the recognition of the learning and competence development through sports, leading to equivalent full and recognized certification on European and national levels
- ensure the comparability and transparency of the skills and competences acquired by young people through sports, by building synergies with similar processes in the lifelong learning sector
- support the transparency and portability, policy learning and best practices transferring
- Include representatives of youth and sport organisations in different bodies related to the recognition and validation of non-formal and informal learning as a relevant stakeholder.

THE SPORT ORGANISATIONS AND SPORT CLUBS TO:

- Develop a culture of lifelong learning among sport practitioners, coaches and athletes by ensuring they have access to and support for developing their roles through the validation of the learning and competencies gained through sports
- Encourage research into the socio-economic impact of learning and competence

development through sports, including the contribution of sport organisations and grassroots sport movements

- Develop a common understanding and a joint strategy in the sport sector and improve co-operation and communication regarding the recognition of the learning and competencies gained through sports
- Advocate for adequate policy framework and quality assurance mechanisms, determining roles, responsibilities and procedures for validation and recognition of the learning gained through sports
- Develop a common understanding and language, on the competencies gained through sports together with stakeholders from the employment and social sectors
- Create partnerships and projects with stakeholders working on the topic of volunteering, furthering the assessment, validation and recognition of the learning gained through sports
- Create stronger links between sports and the youth and lifelong learning strategies and further reinforce the political process on European level
- Establish synergies with Educational and training institutions that can carry out assessment and certification, provide support for identification and documentation, including information and guidance and support individuals in the process of validation and recognition of the competences and learning gained through sports.

CONCLUSION:

Within the sport sector there is a lack of a clear system for the recognition of the learning and competence development through sports. By system it is meant that there is a policy – and preferably an inclusive one – as well as a vision, a culture of recognition of the learning and competences development through sports and a holistic approach to the process. In detail, this could mean:

- Formal recognition, meaning the “validation” of learning outcomes and the “certification” of a process within the sport practice by issuing certificates or diplomas which formally recognise the learning achievements of an individual.
- Political recognition, meaning the recognition of the skills and competencies gained through sports in different policy strategies, and the involvement of sport providers in these strategies.
- Social recognition meaning that social players acknowledge the value of competences acquired in sport settings and the work done within sport activities, including the value of the sport clubs and organisations providing this work.
- Self-recognition, meaning the assessment by the individual athletes or coaches of their learning outcomes and the ability to use these learning outcomes for future employment and in other fields