

*She Empowers -  
Economical Empowerment  
of Women  
through Education*

**A COMPETENCE FRAMEWORK  
FOR PROFESSIONALS  
WORKING WITH  
UNEMPLOYED WOMEN**

Associazione Work in Progress – **Italy** European Inclusion Programme– **France**

Göteborgs Stad SDF Askim-Frölunda-Högsbo – **Sweden**

Rökstólar Samvinnumiðstöð – **Iceland**

Take Initiative vzw - **Belgium**



**Erasmus+**

This is one of the Intellectual Outputs of the project 2014-1-SE01-KA204-001024. The European Commission support for the production of this publication does not constitute an endorsement of the contents which reflects the views only of the authors, and the Commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein



Swedish Council for  
Higher Education



Göteborgs  
Stad



## Introduction

The “*She Empowers*” project was a 3-year action research approach, carried out by professionals across 6 countries, to explore unemployed women’s access (or return) to economic activity.

The **project** included:

- a 12 month-period of **mapping “good practices”** in 5 European countries
- 18 months of national-level “action researching” – running a series of **Pilot Actions in 4 of these countries** to implement elements of the good practices observed previously. These Pilot Actions have also incorporated a dimension of experimental cross-sector collaboration.
- work on this current document whose purpose is **the identification of competences required for adult educators and other service providers in this field** to work more effectively within their own organisations and in collaboration with other agencies
- the organisation of 2 experimental **European-level Training Modules** to respond to some of the competence needs identified.
- the production of a **Training Manual** to present the detail of these modules as well as give some concrete examples of other modules for further use in staff-training at national and local levels in the adult education field

The conclusions presented in this **Competence Framework** are based, therefore, on more than 2 years of observation, needs analysis and piloting. Our thinking has been influenced by various skype Peer Learning moments amongst professionals as well as by workshops carried out at 2 prior Learning Activities during which practitioners involved in the piloting – from Belgium, Iceland, Italy and Sweden - shared issues that have arisen in their countries together with the project’s Action Research Coordinator in Belgium (May 2015) and in France (October 2016).

It was during the latter activity that we decided which should be the themes of the experimental Training Project Modules organised at European-level in spring 2017 – based on the priority needs identified in the field. This document does not detail those “training offers” - this is done in the Training Manual to be found on our website - but focuses, instead, on the roles, tasks and competences to facilitate women’s “road to work”.

In summary then, the aim of this Competence Framework is *to identify the key competences required by professionals to work – in an empowering way – with women who are on the move towards integrating some form of economic activity. As we will explain later, in our view, that means also supporting womens’ employability.*

To enable the readers to follow the thread of our thinking, we present here a breakdown of the parts of this document – the different sections are highlighted in blue:

**Section A** gives an overview of *whose competences* we are focusing on – examining the roles and main tasks of different services which intervene at some level in the empowerment process of an unemployed woman (page 5).

**Section B** goes on to describe *the framework* we have chosen for presenting the competences and our reasoning for doing so. It includes a *definition of employability as opposed to employment* and a *model of the empowerment process* as we see it (page 14).

**Section C** details *the competences* that we see as necessary for professionals working to support women’s employability. We have chosen to present them across the 4 stages presented within the framework of the empowerment process model explained in section B (page 19)



Section A

Who are the professionals? Which roles do they play?





Principally, we are concerned with the competences of adult educators. However, we have seen that the responsibility of facilitating ***the transition of unemployed women into economic activity*** is shared by many professionals. They may work in Employment Agencies, Job Centres, Coaching Services, Community Centres, specialised therapeutic bodies, Enterprise Services – as well as within adult education and other organisations offering non-formal education and/or vocational training. They may even be employers in the job market itself.

We have taken into account competences that would be relevant to as many of these professionals as possible. We started by classifying services - and roles - below according to where, and how, we understand they fit into the ***employability process*** of an unemployed woman going back to work – or entering economic activity for the first time.

It is important here to have an overview of the map of the diverse services involved in order to understand the variety of actors, tasks and roles which exist and, therefore, the range of competences required at different stages of the process. We have divided those services into 3 broad types:

- ❖ ***Frontline services*** – are those with whom unemployed women first come into contact when they have decided to get into the world of work ***(see 1 & 2)***
- ❖ ***Education, Training & Follow-up services***– are those which have a function of raising competences to increase women’s chances of finding work - and keeping it! ***(see 3 & 4)***
- ❖ ***Self-Employment / Enterprise services*** – are those offering information, guidance, training and support to start-up own – or cooperative – businesses ***(see 5)***

## ➤ ***Frontline Services***

**1. Registration & Assessment Services:** *these would include professionals in State (Un)Employment Agencies, private Employment Agencies, Social Welfare offices etc.*

They are those who meet, at least, those women who satisfy the criteria for unemployment or other social benefits. What we have found, however, is that many ***women without work*** do not access even frontline services because they cannot “tick the boxes” required to register as ***unemployed!***

There may be many reasons for this: for example, their partners may already be in work and bring income into the home or there may be health or childcare issues affecting their availability for full-time work. But they may simply be unaware of, lack the necessary information - or language competence - to make the first move towards exactly those services which could open doors towards further training or work opportunities. This situation highlights the need for ***community-based services to act as a bridge*** between the actual social contexts of many marginalised women without work and the services which could help them integrate some form of economic activity (read also 3 below).

Their task involves identifying the current situation of the client and matching their potential with an existing opportunity for work. Additionally, they often have responsibility for assessing rights to unemployment benefits and other forms of social assistance. They are the professionals who are closest to the demands-side of the labour market – focusing on job opportunities, job market tendencies and “assessing the distance” of the unemployed women from those. In other words, they are interested in getting an ***“employment result”*** and are usually under some pressure to reduce official unemployment figures.

As far as we understand, these services tend to leave more autonomous, educated individuals to their own devices - simply monitoring their efforts to find work or moving them onto more specialised services - whilst focusing limited individual support services on those women “with issues” or with special needs (of being from a migrant background, a low-income family, in receipt of social benefits for health, housing etc.).

Carrying out assessment interviews, giving information and monitoring efforts and progress made by individuals would seem, to us, to be the main tasks of these professionals here vis à vis unemployed women.

We understand that there is a need here to focus on the competence of “*meeting people where they are*”, exploring **their** actual competences and past experiences but especially in relation to matching these competences to the existing job market or employment creation opportunities.

Either these services extend their role, post-registration and assessment, to include a “job-seeking and matching” function or they may refer their clients to a next-level of service which we would describe as belonging to Group 2.

## **2. Coaching, Self-esteem Building, Motivational Services:**

These are sometimes integrated into Job Centres/Employment Agencies – but are, in some places, carried out by freelance individuals or organisations “contracted in” to carry out this role.

These services involve professionals working more closely with individuals to discover their intrinsic motivations and desires in professional development terms but still with a focus on building their motivation to move forwards – and out of unemployment! In other words, most of the professionals working in this field support **employment**. They also have a role of identifying gaps in competence levels for specific, chosen fields of work and recommending further education or training. It is often within this context that an unemployed woman may work on her CV or interview presentation techniques. Aiming towards **employment** might lead to getting a job more quickly but it is a short-term strategy in terms of the complexity of the labour market and – more importantly – perhaps an unsatisfactory solution for the persons involved in the longer-term.

It is, indeed, a competence here to help women imagine options they may not have dared to envisage so far – including the **creation of** their own employment. It is also important that they really “own” – and are able to present to the outside world - competences developed through previous education, work **and general life experiences**. The **transferability** of certain skills and qualities developed through being the family caretaker, for example, is not always obvious to unemployed women whose “work experience” has been mainly on the domestic front.

In our understanding, the task here involves empowering the person to focus on both **BEING** (learning, understanding, becoming, growing their confidence and self-esteem – their own **personal** development in other words) and **DOING** (setting objectives, making plans – and taking steps towards their goals – their **professional** development in this context).

We have observed that the focus often moves very quickly onto the **DOING** at the expense of the **BEING** - probably because of pressure from the institutional context to move the person on and out of their situation of dependence on financial assistance or benefits. We have identified differences between approaches of professionals according to whether they are working with clients who want to **change jobs or careers** (those who are already working and financially independent of the State) and those who are technically registered unemployed: the “contract” is obviously of a different nature – and the task of the professional less focused on one specific result! We would, however, question the long-term sustainability of the choices made under this kind of pressure if there has not been due consideration of multiple potential options and more intensive focus on personal motivations.

When discussing the competences needed by these professionals – we felt that “**understanding the broader picture**” is essential: it is important that they have considered **how the process of empowerment actually works** and are able to facilitate the client’s understanding of the wider context of their choices - and the consequences of choosing one option as opposed to another.



There is a need also for the professional to be aware of, and transparent about, their own - and their organisation's - values and perspectives.

Equally so, being aware of the ***need for, and having the ability to create, safety*** is vital so that the client herself may be authentic, patient with her own development, listen to her own needs and take those needs into account as well as those of her family context.

### ➤ ***Education, Training and Follow-Up Services***

#### **3. Short- to mid-term Educational & Vocational Training Courses:**

If gaps are identified, at an earlier stage, in their levels of experience and competence, the most common "offer" made available to unemployed women is that of a structured short- or mid-term training courses. These are usually run by a specific professional training body or educational institution with the aim of the women obtaining some form of recognised qualification in a specific domain where job vacancies are known to exist in the labour market.

Short-term computer-programme training, care of the elderly or of people with disabilities, catering, domestic or industrial cleaning, would, for example fall into this category. Competences of the professionals here would, of course, be those necessary to be able to deliver qualification-giving education in a specific domain (vocational expertise) and, usually, some form of teaching qualifications – or at least experience - in adult education.

This type of service also includes short-term ***learning spaces*** provided by non-formal education or community service bodies with the broader intention of increasing self-confidence levels, motivation and the ***general "readiness for work"*** of women who have been isolated from the labour market for some time. They have more of a ***personal development and social-integration function*** than a vocational one – offering a bridge between the, often isolated, unemployed woman and the world of economic activity. They are usually community-based courses – going out to meet the women "***where they are***". They do not usually focus on any one recognised professional certification but on "***opening doors***", broadening horizons and motivating women to take further steps towards their own autonomy-to-work.

They are often held outside formal institutions in more informal settings in neighbourhoods where, for example, there is a high level of unemployment or a large immigrant population. These non-formal education courses are usually more specifically-targeted towards certain, more marginalised groups - and less widely publicised or available to the general public. For example, they may be contracted in by an Employment Service focusing only on women in receipt of unemployment benefit or some other form of social welfare assistance.

The competences required by professionals working within this latter type of "offer" are more complex and usually combine the competences of both ***support-giving and learning-facilitation***. They have to be prepared to work both at individual level - with vulnerable and isolated women (often from different cultural backgrounds) – but, at the same time, be able to ***facilitate groups as peer learning forums*** in order to develop the social competences of participants. It is important, here too, that they have an understanding of the broad framework of empowerment processes and the willingness to cooperate with other bodies to "broaden" the choices offered to participants.

If the ultimate aim is, however, that the women get closer to economic activity, there also needs to be the capacity on the part of the professionals to ***promote the women's employability*** – being able to help them ***apply*** the learning carried out in an educational environment to integrate the world of work. That means a capacity to also focus on the ***DOING*** and not only the ***BEING*** (as described in 2 above). In this specific context, this means supporting women in "***visioning***" ***their professional future*** and providing them – or, even better, supporting them in ***learning how to find*** – useful

information about the labour market (professions in demand, trends, tools for job searching, making effective CVs, motivation letters etc.).

But it also means **helping women understand better and prepare themselves for entering the world of work**. Women who have been out of – or who have never been in – the labour market have often an unrealistic image of it and of the impact getting a job might have on their lives. As well as their informal, or more support-giving role, professionals should not underestimate the important part “having a job” can have in a woman’s self-development process. Not only does it increase her social and professional network, enrich her CV, make it easier to find another job subsequently but, above all, it provides a kind of financial safety-net. This, in turn, may contribute to the fulfillment of more basic needs (in Maslow’s words “deficiency needs”) allowing her the space and energy to go further towards her own self-actualisation.

All in all, what is important to underline is that the guiding goal for professionals should be to support women’ self-actualisation: that is **the space in which empowerment, employment and employability connect together**. Whether the focus should be more on one or the other dimension is a choice that professionals take - together with each client - according to their individual circumstances, desires and needs.

#### **4. Training On The Job and Follow-Up Services:**

Some vocational programmes already build in an aspect of *training on the job* during their course – **alternating classroom contexts and hands-on situations**. Others may have developed links with the labour market to provide this as a planned “next step” to facilitate women’s progression from initial training to the world of work in a measured step-by-step way. This has been a proven good practice that can really break the barriers between the newly-qualified woman and the world of work she aspires to enter.

But it seems to be an unfortunately rare practice and often what happens, in spite of the quality, level or duration of the initial training offer, is that many women fall back into their initial unemployed state without the resources or ability to apply what they have learned and “act out” the newly-acquired competences. What is often missing is the capacity to present to employers what is **known** - but not yet really experienced - and an understanding of **what still remains to be learned** in order to gain more practical experience or new competences e.g. linguistic.

Only those who are equipped, on exiting an initial training course, with the self-confidence to actively present themselves for work and who have the necessary support from their immediate environment (family, friends etc.), personal resources (resilience to face rejection) - **as well as the vocational competences** of the specific chosen field of work - tend to succeed.

One response tested in this type of situation is a **practical work placement in a “sheltered” environment** where extra support is organised from professionals and peers chosen by the woman herself. At present, it has only been tried out with women who have some form of **added disadvantage (e.g. physical or mental disability or disorders)**. We can, however, imagine this approach having a broader application and being effective, for example, also with women experiencing **cultural integration or linguistic difficulties**. These are major stumbling blocks for women from a foreign background, for example, to access current labour market opportunities.

It may, at first sight, seem to be an expensive, over-personalised approach but, once **collaborative inter-agency systems** are in place, it becomes more feasible. And, in the longer-term, if the chances of the woman becoming more financially autonomous and independent of state-aid are so much greater, it may prove to be worth the initial investment.

This approach does, however, force us to ask such questions as:

- *How can employers be made aware of the induction needs of more vulnerable women?*
- *What do employers need to realise the usefulness of this approach?*
- *What kind of incentives exist for employers to give an “extra hand” to those who do not meet 100% of the criteria for a specific job?*
- *Who “equips” employers with the competences to offer this kind of support to vulnerable women?*
- *Who should be the “collaborators” for this to work in practice?*

But, we would argue that it takes us even beyond the questions around **support-on-the job** and into the whole issue of **follow-up or follow-through with “unemployed women who are on the move towards integrating some form of economic activity”**.

It has become obvious, from the descriptions of all the above service providers, that no one agency or organisation includes this task in their professional role. Hence the need for the **collaborative inter-agency systems** that we talk about above – and for developing tools and processes that take **the whole path** into account.

This is the subject of another document on the issue of **cross-sector collaboration** based on our experiences of the Pilot Actions carried out. We also explore there the suggestion of a “new professional role ” we think may be necessary in this field – a kind of **service broker or network manager** who would promote smoother transitions for the unemployed – or the newly-employed – woman between organisations who are offering services to promote their integration into economic activity.

But, in the meantime, we would suggest that each of the service providers has some basic questions they need to ask themselves:

- *Where does our role with the women who come to us begin and end?*
- *Who analyses the needs of the women involved – and how? And when?*
- *Who follows them through? With what aim?*
- *Who finances the process?*
- *Are we clear, as an agency, about the limits of the roles and responsibilities of our professionals?*

## ➤ **Self-employment (Enterprise) Services**

### **5. A Focus on Enterprise:**

We had hoped to be able to highlight, within the She Empowers project, some examples of women **creating their own employment** and developing the enterprise skills required to do so. We had thought it would be an interesting “good practice” element to transfer from one area to another and an opportunity to show that women could build on existing competences in a specific field to develop an economic activity on their own or with others.

Two examples of good practice were initially presented during the Mapping Process in this domain – from Spain and Sweden - and one pilot action was developed in Sweden. However, it seems like the gap was too wide, in most piloting areas, between the unemployed women targeted and the services available to test the transfer of these good practices. Or else, the networks established for collaboration did not include the necessary professionals – or resources - to develop this idea further during the She Empowers pilot period.

The pilot action in Sweden explored ways of involving women in a special experimental project to start up more social cooperative businesses. The idea was to motivate unemployed women,

currently distant from existing labour market opportunities, to get involved in ***cooperative efforts to create their own employment***, going beyond their current difficulties (often cultural and linguistic) to break down some of the barriers preventing them from putting into practice their already-developed competences. The pilot action proposed a first step in terms of actually finding part- or full-time work in an existing – or newly-established – social business to get some first-hand experience of what would be involved to co-create a business at a later stage.

In spite of intense collaborative efforts between different agencies to reach these women on their “home ground” and present them with a step-by-step introduction to the process and, even though there were readily-available resources to both provide protected places and financial backing, the women targeted did not feel ready - or empowered enough - to register for participation.

As we say, we think it would be very worthwhile to explore this area further – but it goes beyond the scope of our current project - and would involve equipping professionals in this specific field of “enterprise education” (business creation and development) with the competences to work with women who are traditionally further away from this option than the usual clients of enterprise-creation bodies.

Section B  
**A framework for talking about competences**





Crucial to developing our understanding of the competences required to support the integration of unemployed women into some form of economic activity has been the **development of our own thinking regarding our “value-base”** as a collective of professionals. We would like to take the opportunity to explain it here as an introduction to **WHY** we think it is important to talk about this when broaching the subject of competences in general.

**Competences are about skills, knowledge and attitude** – right? Seems simple! We started out with the assumption that what makes any project **good** depends greatly on the competence of the professionals carrying it out and, on that basis, we collected information about what the **professionals themselves** said about the competences required within the various Pilot Actions.

But, what we have realised in talking about “competence building” is that we’re NOT just talking about ticking things off on a list.... For example - we need to have more knowledge about what employers are looking for in a CV these days? OK – found the information, read it - done! Or, we need to be able to carry out a motivational interview with an unemployed person? OK, practiced that twice with a colleague and have carried out 3 now with clients – OK, done! Improving our knowledge-background and our actual skills to carry out particular tasks is, of course, very important and we have built our Training Modules on that basis and in that belief! But there was something more fundamental that was still missing– and the term “attitude” did not really help us to explain what we meant by that. How do you train someone in attitude? And which attitude?

What has helped us is the concept of **inner readiness** introduced by colleagues in the non-formal education field (Kitokie projektai in Lithuania) and who describe it as such: “**...without proper inner readiness, knowledge and skills cannot be fully integrated into an individual’s state of being and therefore often do not lead to action. Inner readiness includes personal motives, desires & passions, experiences, emotional states, beliefs & values, physical & mental conditions, feelings etc.**”

Our understanding is that, in whatever domain we have chosen to be competent (or gain new competences in), we have usually done so because that area of work **resonates with us** – it corresponds to our **personal motivations, passions, beliefs and values**. We have a clear intention that underlies it – and we know **WHY** we are doing it. We also understand it’s role and relationship to our past experiences and our future aspirations.

What is obvious by now to the reader of this document is **that one of our own strong passions and beliefs** within this Strategic Partnership project has been in **the right of each person to self-actualisation**. Self-actualisation is a process that is definitely related also to the awareness of, and the satisfaction about, the professional choices we make and in which empowerment plays a big role. It’s in the title of our project, “She Empowers”, and it has formed the core of many of the Pilot Actions organised across the 4 piloting countries. It is interesting how often the concept has cropped up throughout the 3 years of learning together.

Over the past 3 years, we have come to a certain number of common conclusions about such things as **quality standards, professional approaches towards the target group, training needs in the field as well as competence requirements**. This is the case even though each country-group has worked relatively separately from the others with only individual support talks between Country Coordinators and the Action Researcher and a few Peer Learning exchange moments via skype as a direct communication-line – apart from our own internal website exchange.

What has emerged– regardless of the form of Pilot Actions that have actually taken place - is a strong shared view that we would like professionals in this field to see themselves, firstly, **as EMPOWERERS of unemployed women** and, secondly, as adult educators, facilitators, psychologists, counsellors, civil servants, accompaniers, coaches, political activists, enterprise trainers etc. This terminology has been **the “glue” of our collective work** – but we needed to check if we shared the same understanding! We clarified what it means to **work on “empowering unemployed women”** – as opposed to preparing them only for employment. We have thought long and hard about what we

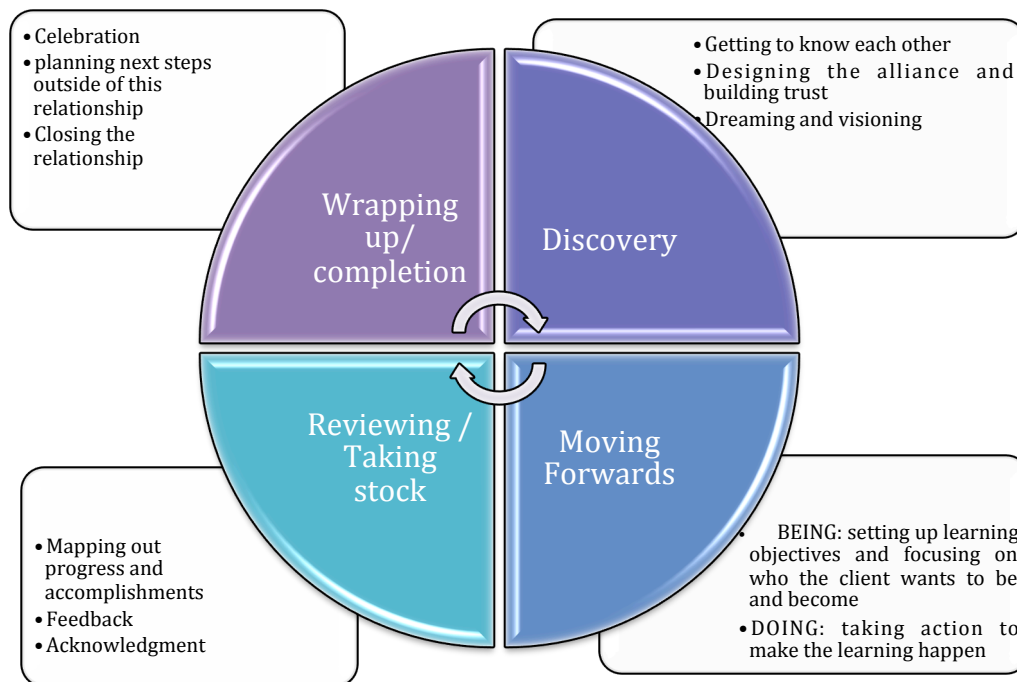
mean when we talk about **an empowerment process**: what the stages and elements involved might include.

In the end, we arrived at the conclusion that working with unemployed women to support their access - or return - to economic activity with a focus on their personal empowerment means, effectively, working also on the development of their **employability**.

**EMPLOYMENT + EMPOWERMENT + EMPLOYABILITY = SELF-ACTUALISATION**

This is why, when looking at our different outputs, you will often find the concept of the E-Factors. Employment is a relationship between two parties, usually based on a contract where work is paid for, where one party - be it a business, non-profit organisation or other entity - is the employer and the other is the employee. With this objective in mind, unemployed people usually look for a job in which they have already some level of experience - where they have the biggest chance of success. Promoting employment, as and of itself, often lacks further analysis: is this a job the person really wants or is passionate about? Is that professional area likely to expand or decrease in the coming years? Has the person enough, and updated, skills for the job or might they better go back into training or to formal education? Is employment a long term sustainable direction for their self-actualisation? We do not believe this is necessarily the case - so we looked for other drivers.

The English Oxford Living Dictionary defines empowerment as “the process of becoming stronger and more confident, especially in controlling one’s life and claiming one’s rights”. In one of our collective learning workshops, an **Empowerment Process Circle** was introduced by trainers who asked participants if this model was useful to position themselves and the service their own agency offered. Where did each of them (and their organisation) see their actual work reflected? – if at all!



Reactions were very interesting and, more so, the fact that no one agency felt they were in a position to fulfill the **whole process of empowerment** proposed.

But, even where their organisation’s role concentrated on only one specific aspect of the circle – for example, “Discovery” - it was felt to be useful to have this kind of framework upon which to “situate”



one's own objectives as well as one's role, tasks and **competences** and have an idea of the overall picture of ***the whole process we would like to be part of facilitating for unemployed women.***

It was also felt to be useful to get a wider perspective on the role of one's own organisation in relation to others and it was suggested that it could be used as a starting point for future collaborations with other organisations – as a way of understanding the different objectives and relationships that each might have vis a vis unemployed women.

What happens if we look at the employment goal in an empowering way? Exploring the concept of employability can play an important role here. Several employability definitions have been developed based on, or including input from, business and industry. In the USA, an Employability Skills Framework was developed through collaboration amongst employers, educators, human resources and labour market associations. This framework states: ***“Employability skills are general skills that are necessary for success in the labour market at all employment levels and in all sectors”.***

Research conducted with employers across Canada led to “Employability Skills 2000+”, which defines employability as “the skills you need to enter, stay in, and progress in the world of work”.

Most of the researchers agree about defining employability as the product of:

- Awareness of one's own competence
- The ability to present properly the competences available in a CV and in a job interview
- The ability to exploit them and to acquire new skills, in order to reach one's own objectives

According to this point of view, employability is not a set of skills but a **range of experiences and attributes** developed through higher-level learning: it is not a “product”, but a process, of learning. Employability continues to develop because a person, once employed, does not stop learning (i.e. lifelong learning).

Therefore, employability - by this definition - is about learning, not least ***learning how to learn***. It is about changing, growing, building a path. If we look from this perspective, employability can be considered as an ***ongoing empowerment process applied to one's professional and career development.***

The general consensus around its potential usefulness led us to decide to combine the empowerment circle model with the concept of employability and to use it as the framework for categorising the different ***key competences required by professionals to work – in an empowering way – with women who are on the move towards integrating some form of economic activity to boost their employability.***



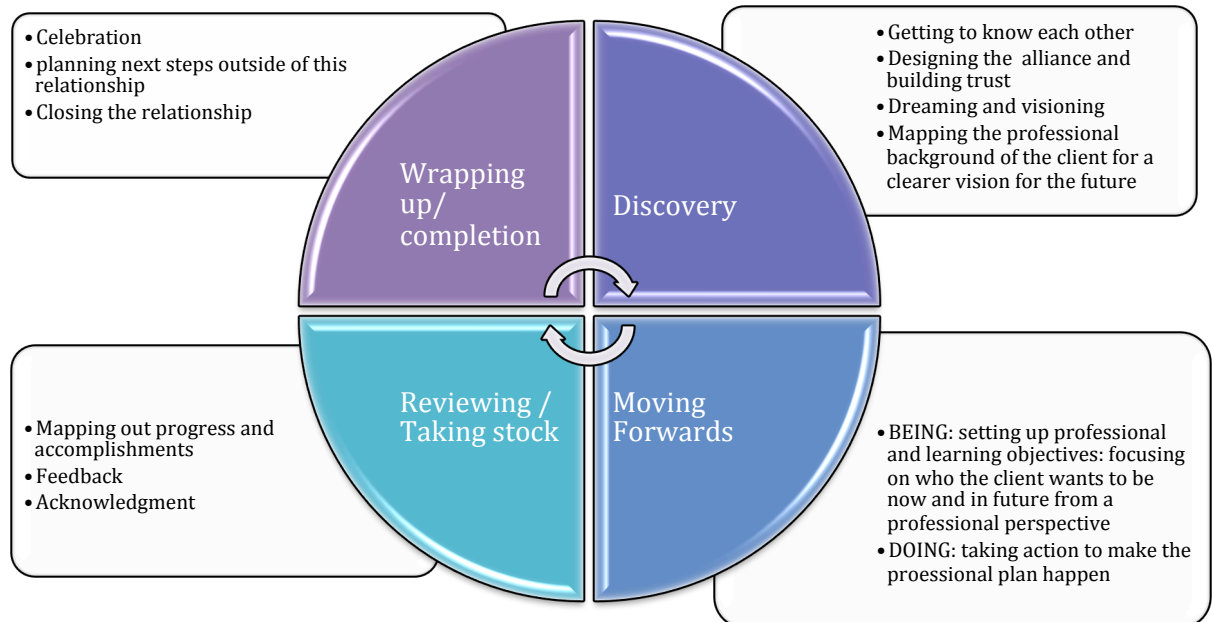
Section C  
**The Competences**





As we have explained in the previous section, the model below is what we will use to “frame” the various competences that we have concluded to be necessary for professionals **working with unemployed women to support their self-actualisation**.

**Figure 1: The Empowerment Process towards Employability & Self-Actualisation**



We have chosen this way of **presenting competences by objectives or by phases**– and as part of an **overall process** - as opposed to simple lists as might be the case if we had chosen to present them as per type of “professional agency”. We will be as specific as possible and not only identify broad headlines – but, first of all, we clarify what the 4 phases are, as we see them:

In the **Discovery Phase**, the emphasis is on getting to know each other, designing an alliance between the professional and the client meaning that they agree on what they each need to work well together and to install trust - both in the empowerment relationship and in each other - in order to make this a safe learning space for the client. This is also the phase where the client gets to dream, aim high and really discover what she wants to do with her life and what kind of job would support **the** dream vision.

In the **Moving Forwards Phase**, there is equal emphasis on both **BEING** and **DOING**. Being means that the client gets to focus on setting *learning* and *professional* objectives and on who she wants to become through the empowerment process towards a new job or career. Doing is about taking steps to make the objectives happen and the client moving closer to the life and job she would like to have. In both it is important that it is the client who is steering towards what she really wants in cooperation with the professional.

**Reviewing/taking stock:** in this phase, the client looks at both the learning and the actions taken and looks at what she has accomplished. This is the time for feedback and acknowledgment of achievements. From this phase, the client either moves on to the completion phase or goes for another round of Moving Forwards if she decides more learning and action need to happen.

In the **Wrapping-up or Completion Phase** the emphasis is on celebrating achievements and looking at possible next steps for the client outside of this circle. This is the time to complete both the process and the relationship between the professional and the client.

As we “collected” the competences of professionals, we found this circle to be at the heart of the work of a lot of labour market mediators, actors and job coaches. That is why we decided to use it to present this competence framework and to **connect the different competences that professionals in the labour market need at the different phases of the model.**

We are aware that professionals in other contexts might add other, specific competences that we have not mentioned - our list is not exhaustive. But we hope that it is an interesting starting point for the discovery of the competences used in different phases and the competences that need further development or training.

## ➤ **Transversal competences**

Before stepping in each part of the circle, it is important to underline that there are some competences that a professional needs, whether he/she works individually with clients or in group-settings and regardless of which phase of the circle the client is in. These are:

***Creating and holding a safe learning environment*** where trust between professional/client can be developed and fostered. This means that the professional has the skills to set up and hold a learning environment that supports the client to move through the different phases in a safe way while getting out of her comfort zone for the sake of empowerment and moving closer to the professional future (instead of just a job) she wants.

***Set the frame to deal constructively with conflicts:*** this is very connected to the safe learning space. If the learning space is safe, the client will feel free to disagree with the professional and conflicts will not only naturally occur but will also be dealt with in a constructive way.

***Set the frame to be able to deal with failing of the client:*** this is connected to the set-up of the learning environment. If this is set up well, both successes and failings of the client will be part of the conversation and the process. It is helpful to clarify the client’s perspective on failing from the start because, if failing is something the client is ashamed about, the professional will have to encourage her more to open conversations about it and bring it into the learning space.

***Encourage active participation:*** connected to the set up of the safe learning environment in the sense that if the client is involved from the very start in the set-up of the learning environment - and knows that she is co-creating and holding it together with the professional - her active participation becomes not only an essential, but also a very natural, part of the process.

***Be aware of own and client’s perspectives:*** we found it important for the professional to be clear on the perspective they come from and to make it also clear to the client. Clients do not only land in the professional’s office but also in the perspective the professional works from. If the perspectives of the professional and client are very different, trust between them may be affected by it, so it is very important that professionals are able to communicate their perspective and are open to have this conversation.

***Knowledge of the specific frame within which the professional works - the methods she works with and the ability to deal with challenges and/or special needs the client might have like mental illness, physical impairment etc:*** linked to being able to see your own perspective and holding the client naturally creative, resourceful and whole.

***Be aware of own norms and the norms of the other stakeholders involved:*** this is also connected to knowing your own perspective. Values and norms are an essential part of the professional’s perspective. So the professional is aware of his/her values and norms and is able to clearly communicate them to his/her client so the client knows what perspective she is stepping into. The openness of the professional about it opens the door for the client to do the same.

**Listen:** professionals listen to their client's story and to what their clients both say - and don't say - to get a good sense of what is going on for them. Listening in this context is not about advice -giving, fixing or sharing one's own experiences. All the focus is on the client and how to support her discovery and journey. The professional's stories are not important once their own perspective in the relationship has been clearly communicated.

**Ask powerful questions:** the professional asks the client open questions aimed at exploration instead of explanation. The aim of these questions is to send the client on an explorative journey of uncharted territory instead of having them explain the stories they already know.

**Facilitate co-creative dialogue with different target groups:** the professional involves clients from different target groups in the empowerment process and creates together with them a process that is meaningful for all parties involved. For the professionals who work with immigrants, having a common language to overcome eventual linguistic barriers is definitely a plus. In any case, intercultural competence is essential while working with migrants. Intercultural competence and intercultural learning are issues that cannot be dealt with here, but we can sum them up saying that it is "an effort to understand the complexity of today's world, by understanding others and ourselves a bit better" (from Intercultural Learning Training Kit)

**Push the motivational button of the client:** here's the bad news - the only person who can push the motivational button is the client herself. It is not the professional's job to look for it or push it. What is the professional's job is to set up a learning space that enables the client to fully show up and go for what they really want. When that has happened from the start - and enough time has been spent on the exploration of the client's dreams, visions, hopes and needs - the client will be fully equipped to take charge of their own process and motivation.

**Creativity, thinking outside of the box:** the professional knows tools to support the creativity and thinking out-the-box of the client and is able to hold space for the vulnerability it requires from the client.

**Being empathic:** the professional is able to recognise emotions in the client, to connect to them away from her own story and experience and to be with the client while she is working her way through the process and the emotions.

## ➤ **Competences needed for working one-to-one with unemployed women**

### **Discovery Phase**

**Support dreaming and visioning:** the professional knows tools and is able to use them to enable clients to get their dreams and visions clear. We found that professionals often either do not have the tools or are worried that, if the client dreams too big, they will not be able to support that dream. The 'not yet' mindset helps professionals to support clients in "dreaming big" while being honest and transparent about the professional's limited resources, time and abilities. The professional makes it clear to the client that certain parts of the dreams and visions may need to be accomplished in a different framework and with support from others. In order to really support the 'not yet' mindset, the professional needs to clearly communicate which parts of the client's dream can be accomplished in this framework and which not.

**Support the client to get their needs and desires clear:** this competence is very similar to the previous one. The professional needs tools to support the client and needs to be clear on which needs and desires can be fulfilled in the framework of this relationship and which not.

**Support the client in mapping her past professional background in order to make it useful for the future:** the professional can use tools such as tests, questionnaires, competence assessments to

help the client examine her past professional experience more explicitly and from a different perspective. The aim is to analyse the past to understand how it can help professional development in the future. This phase can be useful also to identify eventual blocks and gaps that will need to be considered in the *Moving Forward* step

***Support mapping of the client's personal strengths and weaknesses:*** apart from their professional experiences, the client needs to understand their own personal motivations, attitudes and qualities - focusing also on the ones that do not seem to be strictly related to the labour market. Considering that the main point is the person and not the job itself, it is important at this stage to support the client to look at herself in a holistic way, mapping her qualities, strengths and weakness in order to use this awareness in the next stage.

***Encourage the client to take responsibility for their dreams, needs and visions:*** as said before, part of the dreams and visions of clients can, and will, be supported in this empowering relationships, others will not. It is up to the client to take responsibility for defining what belongs where and what comes first. Of course the professional can support the client in the defining process but, at the end of the day, it is what happens in between the different meetings that really counts and the client is responsible for that.

***Hold the client naturally creative, resourceful and whole so they can make the transition from "I am impaired" to "I have an impairment":*** This is connected to the perspective the professional works from. This perspective means that the professional believes in the natural ability, creativity and competences of the client and that she sees potential instead of obstacles and impairment. Holding people bigger than the obstacles and limitations they are facing is what the empowerment circle is all about and the professional has both the awareness and the tools to do that.

***Facilitate the set up of a support network of the client's choice:*** help the client to find other people who can support them move closer to a job or economic activity which incorporates their dreams and visions. If those do not fit within the professional's own framework, they may need to orient the client to other places and people. A specific competence of the professional is also to know what other services might be available for that specific client and to act as a network manager, for example to connect the client to other services that can support their needs in a better way.

***Support the client to recognise and activate resources:*** the professional knows tools to support the client in mapping out the resources she has available to her, in looking for more useful resources and in activating the resources she needs.

***Being aware of gender specificities:*** the professional needs to be able to explore together with the client whether the fact that they are a woman incurs specific considerations in their choices of professional futures and/or support needs to reach their dreams. For example, whether they have family obligations that need to be taken into account, whether their career choice is easily accessible for women etc.

### **Moving forwards Phase**

#### **BEING:**

***Ability to deal with uncertainty and change:*** the professional is able to deal with uncertainty and change for the client's sake. This means that the professional holds the client's agenda and when the client decides to change course the professional is willing and able to follow the client where they need to go.

***Support a becoming/learning process:*** the professional is there to hold the space for the client to learn, grow and become who she herself wants in professional terms. The professional supports the client to formulate learning objectives (that facilitate their professional development), keep track of their achievements and assess the outcomes. The professional does not judge or steer the process - the client is fully in charge of her own learning process.



## **DOING:**

**Set SMART objectives:** the professional supports the client in defining Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-specific goals based on the dreams, needs, learning and professional goals of the client.

**Create a path of small steps and support the client walking on the path:** the professional supports the client in defining a path of small steps toward the achievement of their SMART goals and in mapping out how the client can walk the path the way she visualises.

**Ability to understand and decodify the labour market:** The professional needs to have a wide knowledge of the labour market - including legislation, actors involved, economic trends, job demands and local/regional specificities. In setting her professional objectives, the client has to take the overall context into account. If she doesn't do this then, most likely, her objectives will not be SMART. If the client does not have this information – or if her information is partial, based on prejudice or simply unrealistic – it is an expected competence of the professional to be able to provide this information. Even better - to support the client in learning what information **is** relevant and reliable and locating where to find it.

**Ability to make contact with employers:** If the objective of the client is job-seeking, the professional needs to be able to support them in learning how efficient job-hunting is carried out:

- What are the main methods of job-seeking? Which tools can be used?
- What are the relevant elements in a job advertisement? How to respond?
- What should a CV look like? What CV for what position?
- What is it important to know before going to a job interview? How to behave during a job interview?

In some cases, the professional can also establish the first contact with the employers.

**Match levels of competence to the needs of the business world:** the professional is able to assess what level of competence the client needs to have to be able to apply for certain jobs and supports the client in improving her competence level if needed.

**On the border of being and doing: support a contract and commitment of the client:** the professional is able to negotiate an agreement with the client and by doing so models how the client can negotiate her own agreements and contracts when entering the labour market.

**Explain if any social support services are available and how to benefit from them:** regardless of the country and the level of welfare provision, women are often the ones who take the responsibility of care-taking in the family, including children and elderly parents. In many countries, the welfare systems include different tools, approaches and services that help women to reconcile work and family life. The professional needs to know about those opportunities and how they work in order to assess – together with the client – if and how they can be supportive for the realisation of the woman's action plan.

## **Taking stock/reviewing Phase**

**Assess individual progress, taking into consideration where the client started:** the professional has the ability and the tools to assess the progress of the client and to support them in self-assessment.

## **Completion Phase**

**Harvest learning outcomes:** the professional is able and has tools to support the client in harvesting her learning including mapping out the achievements, the growth that happened and where there are additional opportunities to learn more and grow even further.

**Support next steps that are coherent for the clients purpose and context:** the professional knows how to support the client in designing the next steps that will bring her closer to her dreams and visions outside of the process she has been in with the professional

**Follow up after completion of the activity to empower clients afterwards and to remind them of their power to take charge:** if it is possible, the professional keeps in contact with the client to remind her of the process she has been in, her planned next steps and to keep empowering her to take charge of her own process. By doing this, the professional contributes to the growth mindset agreed on when designing the alliance in the beginning and keeps supporting the client in taking charge of her own growth process.

## ➤ Competences needed to work with groups of unemployed women / training approach

### Discovery Phase

**Understanding the professional's role as "facilitator" instead of "expert":** the professional has no need to control the agenda and is able and willing to follow the lead of the group.

**"Holding" the learning space:** the professional creates and holds a safe environment for participants to be vulnerable involving everyone including shy and quiet individuals. She holds it for others to learn instead of filling it herself. The easy way out is to behave as "an expert" and share what you know. It's an important skill to be able to treat everyone in the room as an expert and not "step above" them. She uses the group to promote individual growth and development. She has the ability to co-create common working principles and act upon them, especially when someone in the group is 'breaking' what has been agreed upon. She is able to create safety because she has an understanding of different learning environments and their advantages and constraints.

**The professional is able to "read the group" and each and every individual in it.** She listens to the group needs and understands that what participants say - and what they mean and feel - is not necessarily the same thing.

**The professional knows when participants are putting up defense mechanisms and how to deal with them:** she knows how to recognise the signs, body posture, tendency to be on the defensive, feelings of unworthiness and shame and knows constructive ways to support participants in dealing with them.

**The professional offers a holistic approach:** she does not just focus on specific vocational or linguistic skills but takes the health, spiritual, physical and mental well-being of the individuals "in learning" into account.

**The professional knows her own competences and is clear on what she can offer:** she knows how to stay "qualified" while being "humble" at the same time. She doesn't put herself on a "higher level". She knows how to create trust within the group and a secure environment for learning to happen.

**The professional has the ability to understand herself as tool:** she depends on herself and her own competences instead of depending on specific methods or tools

**The professional is able to deal with ambiguity & uncertainty:** when she designs a process together with the participants - based on their needs - this process will be uncertain and ambiguous and the facilitator will need to improvise and act in the moment that learning happens. This is a big challenge for those who do not have a lot of facilitation skills/ experience.

***Ability to “stay in role” & be clear about the purpose:*** the professional is able to be transparent and honest about her own purpose and the learning purpose of the process the participants are in. She is able to process her own processes and stay in her professional role while doing it.

***The professional knows how to work with women with special needs:*** she knows when and how to keep the right distance from the sensitive cases, yet still hold the space, when it comes up, in the safe way for the group and the ‘victim’.

***The professional has the competence to network, understand the roles of different operators in the field and recognize the areas of expertise they can contribute.***

### **Moving forwards Phase**

***BEING OF THE FACILITATOR:*** The professional understands the political framework he/she is working within: they understand the political context and what kind of results the different stakeholders need to prove or demonstrate.

***DOING OF THE FACILITATOR:*** The professional is able - and knows tools - to reflect continually on and to name the processes going on in the group and with individuals - as objectively as possible. She focuses on facts rather than on subjective interpretations and knows appropriate reflection tools to support the different processes going on.

***The professional has knowledge of Kolb’s Experiential learning cycle and*** of other tools to support learning objectives. They know where they are leading participants with any specific method and lead them there.

***The facilitator can work with needs analysis and is able to communicate the link between the needs and the programme to the participants:*** they know how to do it, read it, act on it. They are able to make the participants aware how what they do as an educator relates to the needs of participants.

***The professional is able to set clear, measurable and realistic objectives and is clear whose objectives are aimed to be achieved***

***The professional is able to explain the dynamics of the labour market and the ways to make contacts with employers using the group as a resource for learning***

### **Taking stock/reviewing Phase**

***The professional is able to facilitate reflection on personal processes without doing a lot of input.*** The professional has the ability and the tools to support the participants in reflecting on their learning achievements.

***The professional understands the role of evaluation for improvement of services, on the one hand, but also as part of the empowerment process of individuals.*** They are able to evaluate the progress of individuals & groups in cooperation with other services and stakeholders.

***The professional is able to take stock and measure progress:*** they know what measurement tools to use at different times, is able to give and get feedback and acknowledge the progress made by the participants. They know the difference between judgment and feedback and are clear that feedback always comes from the intention of growing the participant and not from their own unmet needs.

## Completion Phase

*The professional knows how to complete and close the group process and the learning space:* they are able - and have appropriate tools - to close the learning space and send participants on their way towards their dreams and visions in other contexts and with other people.

## Some Conclusions

After having described the competences needed to a professional, we want to underline that one element that came out strongly during this process is that **the professional is the main and most important tool of his/her work**. For this reason, we all need to remember that:

- *we are learners and we also need to be engaged in lifelong learning*
- *as our work is based on caring relationships, we need ongoing supervision*
- *if we aim to support our clients in making SMART and healthy professional choices and taking responsibility for them, we have to do the same with our own professional careers*
- *to be able to support dreaming and visioning, we need to be able to do it ourselves!*