

# Intellectual Output 1

## EVIDENCE- GATHERING REPORT



Project no. 2020-1-IS01-KA202-065802

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## Executive summary

EchooPlay project is about innovation in Vocational Education and Training (VET) and aims at developing, testing, adapting and implementing a brand-new methodology that would support educators to direct learners to careers and foster their guidance roles.

This report is describing the emerging needs and challenges about the employability across partner countries, based on the analysis conducted by each partner and their local stakeholders. It presents emerging needs and challenges about the employability.

This report is the starting point for developing the pedagogical approach and the contents necessary to define the toolkit and the board game (ref. IO2 and IO3).

This report has only been reviewed by the authors, who are representing different organizations across Europe and within the project team:

- University of Turku (UTU), Finland
- Miðstöð símenntunar á Suðurnesjum (MSS), Reykjanesbæ, Iceland
- EuroNet, Potenza, Italy
- Kelje Production, Verosvres, France
- StudioDomino, Potenza, Italy



## Acronyms

EU	European Union
HEI	Higher Education Institution
ICT	Information and Communication Technology
IO	Intellectual Output
MCQ	Multiple choice questionnaire
MSS	Miðstöð símenntunar á Suðurensjum training centre
SMEs	Small and Medium Enterprises
UBC	University Business Collaboration
UTU	University of Turku
VET	Vocational Education and Training



## I. Purpose and scope of the evidence gathering report

The purpose of this report is to identify and describe the emerging needs and challenges about employability across partner countries.

The results will be the starting point for developing the pedagogical approach and the contents necessary to define the toolkit and the board game.

The research questions are:

- How do teachers, students, and employers see the employability of graduating students?
- How could educators strengthen and support students' employability?

The research examines the perspectives of the main educational actors: the students, the educators and the industry.

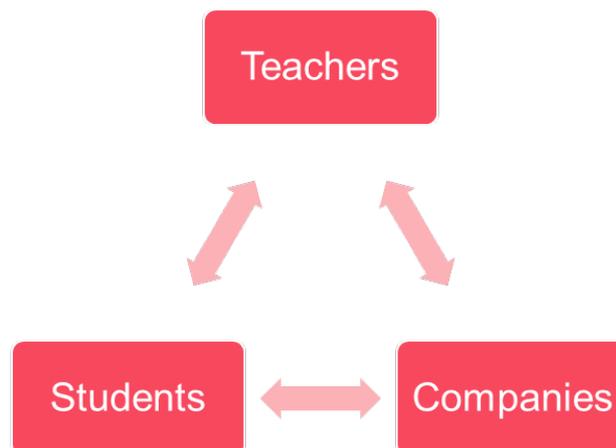


## II. Methods and participants

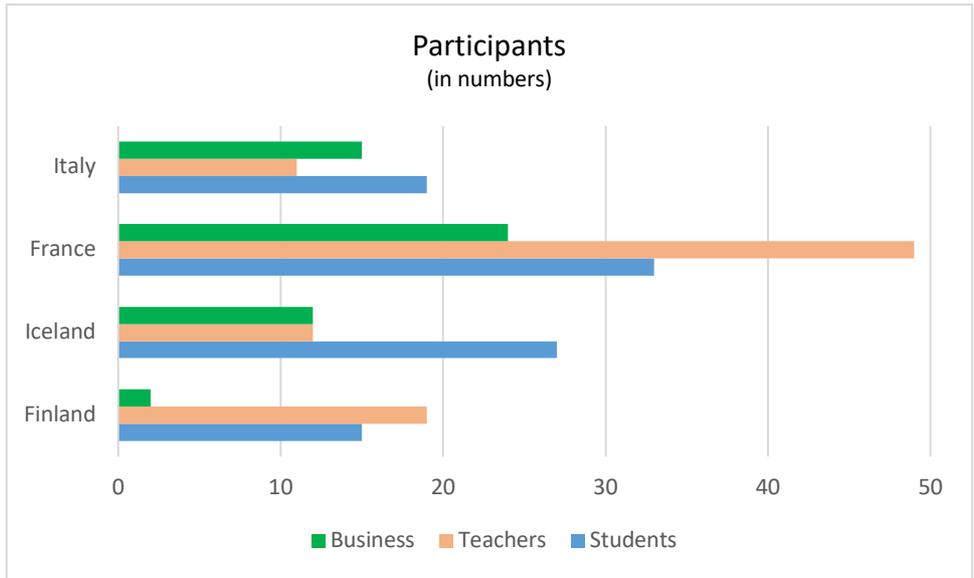
In the context of the Intellectual Output 1 “Evidence Gathering Report”, the research was carried out using multiple choice questionnaires (MCQ) in the four EU partnering countries: Finland, Iceland, Italy and France. The questionnaire included Likert scales and open-ended questions and can be found in Annex 1. The leader of this work package, the University of Turku, formulated the methodology for the research and analysed its results. The research took place between March and June 2021.

The partners carried out the research involving the representative stakeholders of the learning triangle:

- Academics, professors, teachers and educators
- Business representatives
- Students from higher education and participants from Vocational Education and Training Institutions.

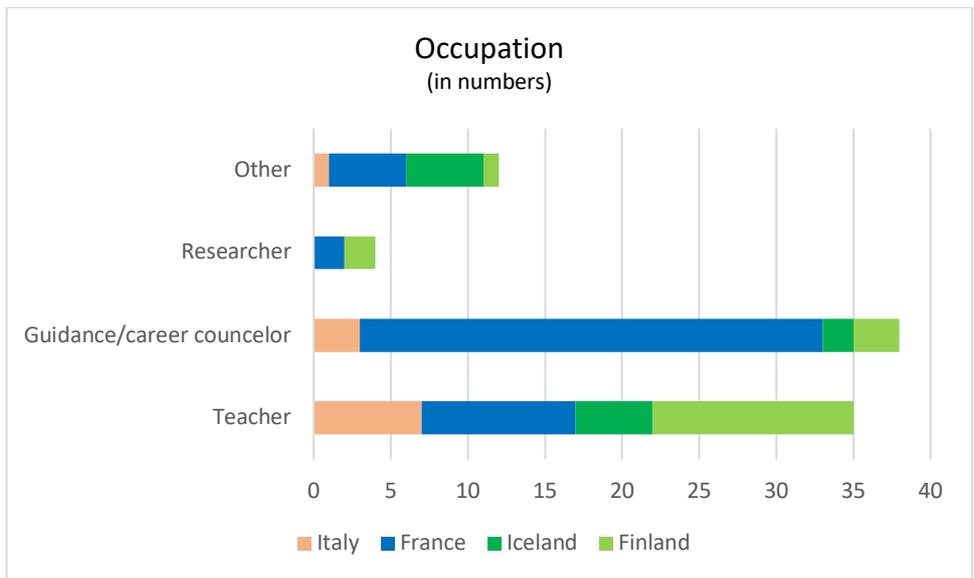


The participants were selected based on convenience sampling which was guided by availability and need to have different profiles: fields of business, age, gender, and ethnic background. For this research have participated: 53 business representatives, 93 students and 91 educators, in total 237 stakeholders. Below is the distribution of the participants, respectively per country and target group:



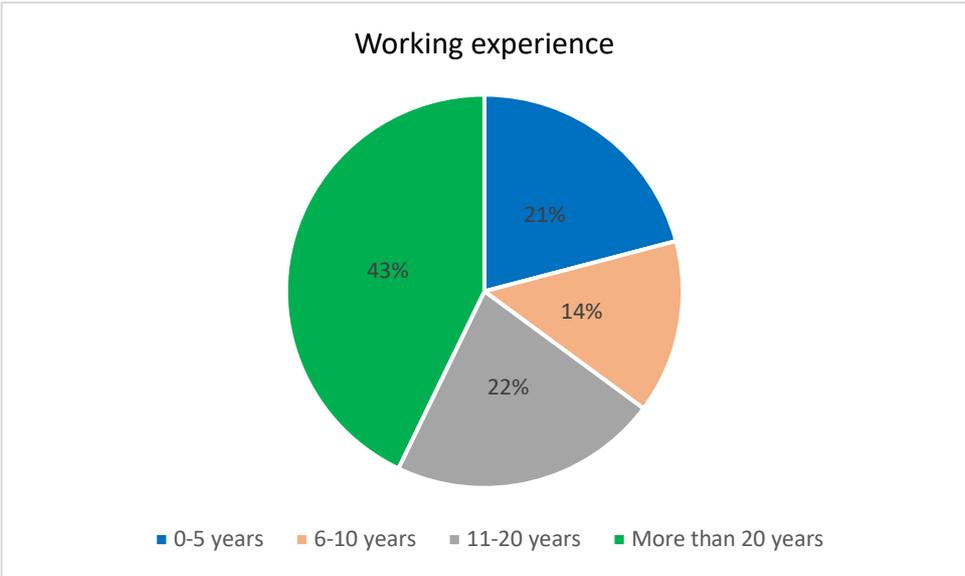
The results from the business representatives per country must be mitigated, as only two answers were received for Finland.

The teacher category is composed of teachers, guidance/career counsellors, researchers and others. The most represented categories are guidance/career counsellors and teachers.



Most of the participants are very experienced and have worked for over 20 years (N=39).





The students taking part in this study are mostly enrolled in higher education or VET schools (N=41). 1/3 is studying at a university (N=30) and the rest is enrolled in either of these institutions. It can be supposed that they are taking part in online education and following other types of training.



### III. Results and discussion

#### Educators

**Employability and job market.** The educators were asked “*What does employability of students mean to you?*” In many cases (about 50%) the description was quite general (“*Have a job and keep it*”). About 10% of the educators were pinpointing the skills match (“*Matching skills to the labour market*”, “*Knowledge of oneself and one's skills in an environment and context*”). About the same number of educators mentioned the aspect of adaptation (“*be able to adapt, interact and act in different working situations*”, “*It is a capacity to give oneself the chance to progress to a job or to adapt professionally to keep it*”) as an important part of employability. Some educators (about 5%) told the word was unknown to them (“*I have never heard this word - I understand neither the word nor the sentence?*”).

Educators from all four countries are well aware of the needs of the market (Median 8 from Likert scale 1-10). Guidance/career counsellors are the most aware of the market needs (average 8.2).

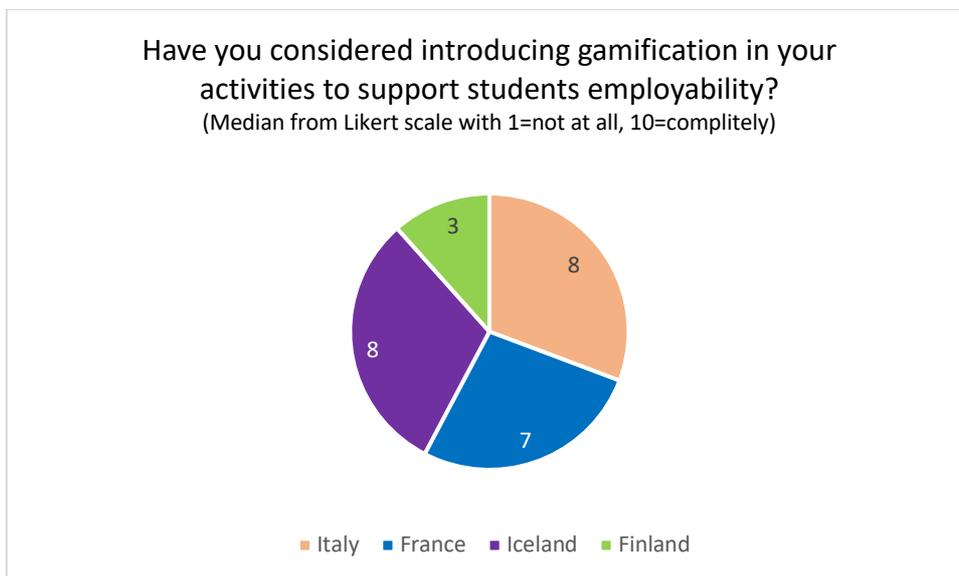
The educators were asked about the challenges regarding employability (“*What are the main challenges you can identify regarding students/graduates' employability?*”). About 50% mentioned a reason which was **linked to the students** (*students' lack of self-confidence, lack of soft skills, lack of motivation, they do not know their strengths, they do not perceive the right networks, they have a poor knowledge of operating culture and practices*). About 20% of the educators mentioned challenges that were **independent of students**. These challenges were linked to organisation of training (e.g. *the use of real and adapted materials, specific tools for any level of young people, using cognitive tools, to achieve trust from the students and get them to participate, distance during online learning / never meeting the students*) or more general, societal reasons (*current health context / pandemia, administrative restrictions, job market*). About 10% of educators mentioned challenges which were linked **both to the students and outside the students**. Their challenges were mostly related to the transition from studies to working life (*professional knowledge, integration into the professional world, identification of skills and career pathways, knowledge about labour market needs, managing of young employees*). Interestingly, 23% of the educators did not answer at all to this question. We could interpret this result by the fact that educators are not aware of students'



employment after graduation. This would indicate that even though the role of the teacher is to ensure the students get the right skills to find employment, the educators have little information regarding the impact and results of their work.

**Support from the institution.** When asked about their needs to support students’ employability, educators replied that what they would need the most is additional time (N=44), followed by training (N=37). Interestingly, they also mentioned that they would need innovative and more tools (N=5), adapted resources (N=3) and to know better about the needs of the market (N=2).

**Gamification.** On average, educators are mitigated regarding the introduction of gamification in regards to employability (average 6). 22 of them are in favour, by responding 9 and 10 on the Likert scale, with 10 representing completely agreeing. Educators with 6 to 10 years’ experience are the most willing to introduce gamification for this purpose (average 7.2); whereas the least experienced educators (less than 5 years) are undecided (average 5.7). Nonetheless, 17 of the educators all together are not in favour at all and answered 1 or 2 (not at all). Regarding gamification, it is worth noticing that Finland is the least country to consider introducing gamification in regards to employability (Median 3 from Likert scale 1-10).



**The effects of COVID-19 pandemic.** The educators were asked about the effects of the pandemic with the question “How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employability of your students?” Almost 70% mentioned negative effects which were linked to both students (lack of motivation, isolation, dropping out, difficulty in projecting one’s future) and the changes in working life and internships. Many of the educators were extremely worried and wrote long answers with variety of



effects: *“I think it has damaged the employability of young people (loss of work experience, decrease in credits, increase in unemployment)”*. About 9% of the educators mentioned both negative and positive effects depending on the sector: *“The pandemic does not affect all sectors and graduates in areas such as technology, social and healthcare are well employed, as is the situation in trade and administration. On the other hand, the creative industries, tourism and catering have come to a complete standstill, which has also affected the employment of graduates in these sectors”*. Only two educators mentioned only positive effects which were both linked to digitalisation.

## Students

**Employability and needs of the market.** Students’ answers to the question *“What does the term “employability” mean to you?”* contained a very broad aspect of having the skills to get a job. Sometimes some skills or competencies were mentioned e.g. *“responsible”, “how to manage your time and skills”*. About 10% of the students stressed the interaction between the skills and the needs of the companies:

*“to have skills that are interesting to current companies, and therefore our ability to be recruited”*

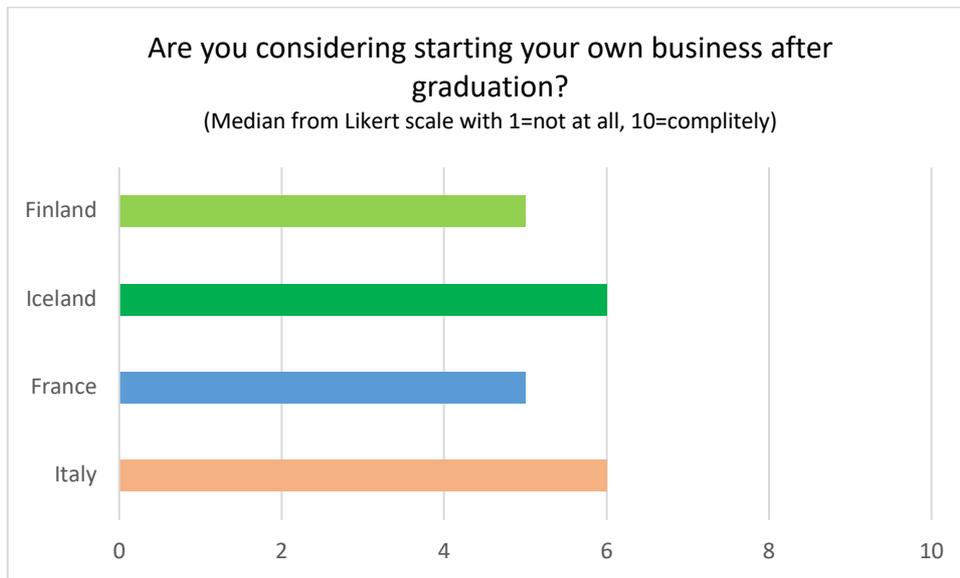
It is important to notice that about 10% of the students mentioned the word is unknown to them. In some cases, the term was understood to refer to the companies and their ability to hire people.

Students are on average ready to enter the job market (7.4) and most of them (N=26) selected 10 from Likert scale 1 to 10 with 1=not ready to 10=very ready. The readiest are students from Finland who answered on average 9. The least ready are from France (6.5).

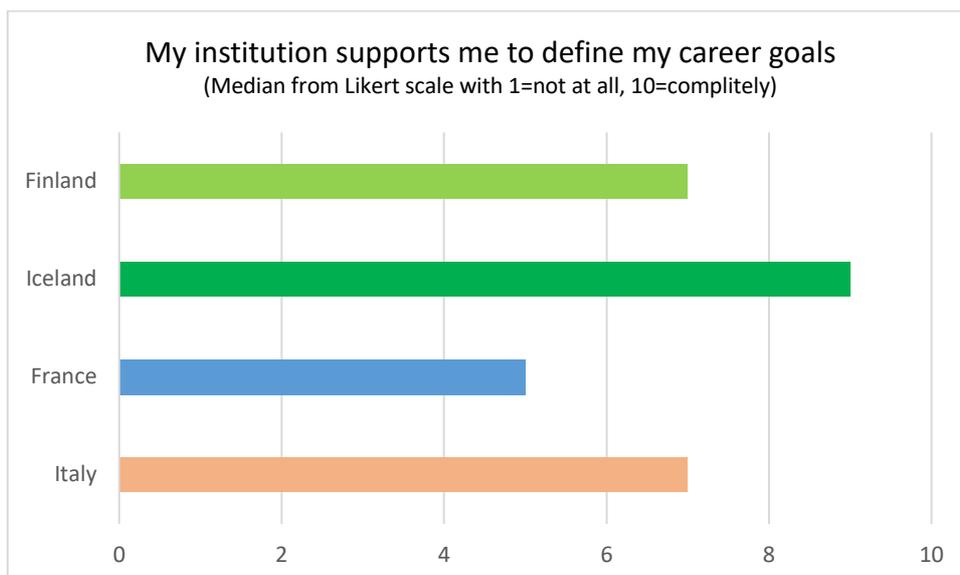
When asked if they would consider starting their own business after graduation, the median is rather low (5 from Likert scale 1 to 10) and most students selected 1 (not at all, N=21). When looking at the average per country, Finland ranks lowest with an average of 4.1 and Iceland highest with 5.7. When looking at students’ place of study, students enrolled at higher education institutions are less willing to start their businesses, with an average of 4.7, against students who are not enrolled (average of 5.7). 16 students indicated that they really want to start their business, by answering 9 or 10 on the Likert scale. These students are mostly from Iceland (N=10) and enrolled in secondary schools (N=8). 25 students indicated that they will not become entrepreneurs after graduation, by



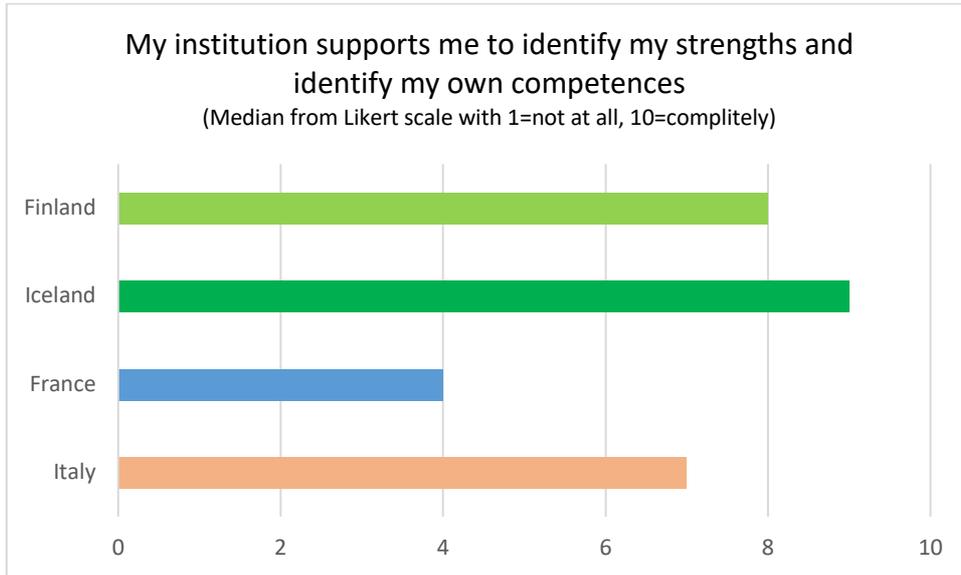
answering 1 or 2 on the Likert scale. The results do not show a tendency based on their educational background as 11 of them are enrolled in secondary school, 10 in a university and 4 nowhere. The results indicate that most students might start their own business but it is still uncertain. These answers can be due to the fact that most students are studying to get a diploma (N=62) and could be at the beginning of their studies, while only a third are studying to upskill or reskill (N=31).



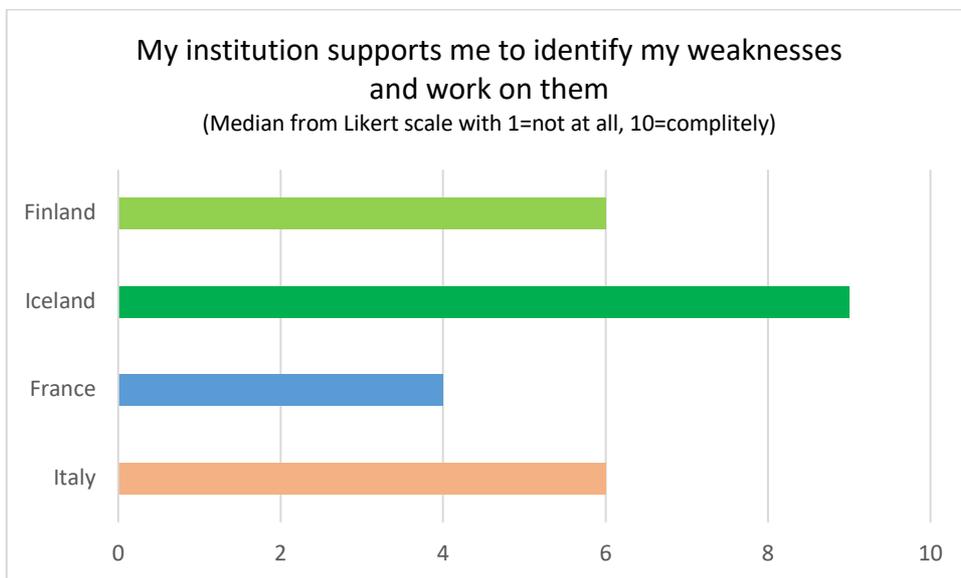
**Support from the institution.** According to the results of the survey, French students seem the least satisfied with the support they receive from the institution to define their career goals (Median 5 from Likert scale 1-10). Defining career goals seem to be well handled in Iceland (Median 9 from Likert scale 1-10).



Similarly, French students are the least satisfied with the support they get to identify their strengths and own competences (Median 4 from Likert scale 1-10).

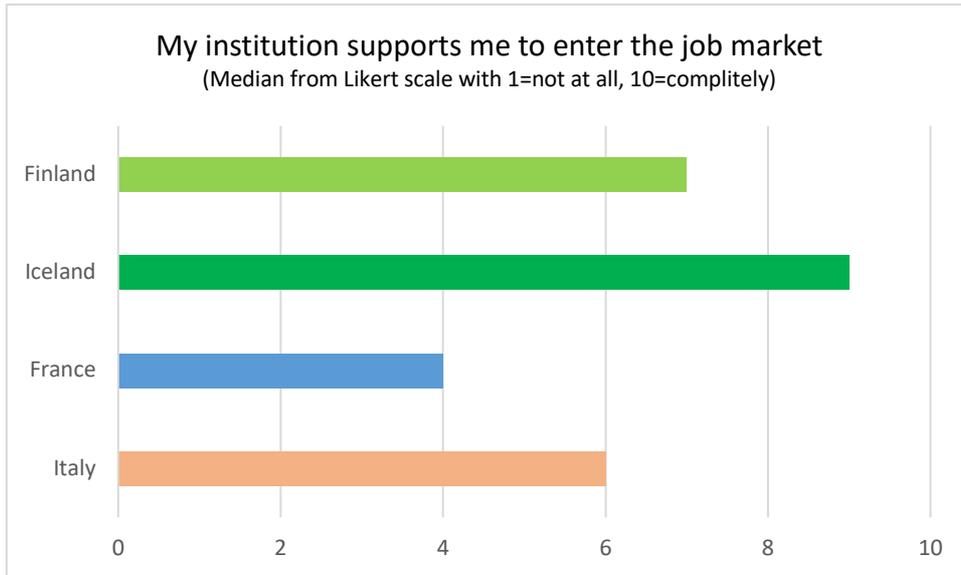


The same logic happens with the identification of weaknesses and to work on them (Median 4 for French students from Likert scale 1-10).

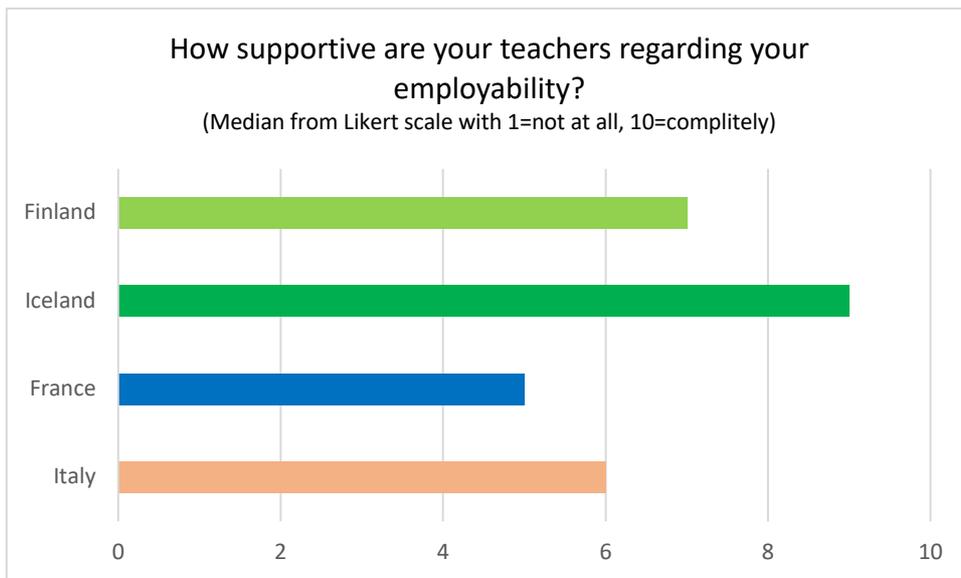


Students from France and Italy answered that their institution supports them the least to enter the job market, compared to Iceland and Finland.





Educators in Iceland seem the most supportive regarding employability (Median 9 from Likert scale 1-10).



**The effects of COVID-19 pandemic.** About 60% of the students saw the effects of COVID-19 only negatively regarding their employability. As one student says: “A disaster.” Some of them had lost their jobs, others had difficulties with mobility. Many also predicted that they will have difficulties entering the labour market because of hard competition. During the pandemic, meeting others has been put on hold, which has effects: “Less contact, less network”. However, about 8% of the students also mentioned positive effects. These were mainly linked to the development of digital technology both in teaching and in workplaces: “Positive because it has reduced the importance of



location". On a personal level this has been encouraging: *"Personally I think it will be positive, over a year of being 100% distance learning and still being allowed to manage projects!"* About 3% mentioned both positive and negative effects. However, 13% of students mentioned that COVID-19 has not had any effect on their employability. This can also be due to the fact that these students are not close to graduation and therefore predict that by the time they graduate, the pandemic will not have any effect on their employability. Some of them had e.g. just got an internship before the pandemic. About 10% did not know about the effects.

## Companies

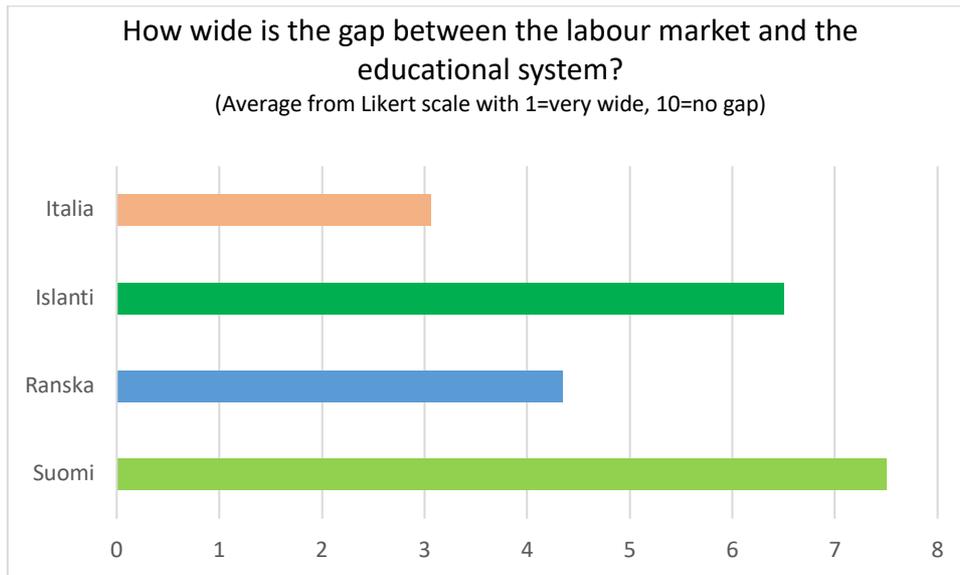
**Employability and job market.** The companies were asked *"What does the term employability mean to you?"* About 15% of the respondents had a very practical interpretation: *"Have the capacity to work", "Having the necessary skills and qualities to make someone attractive to employers"*. About 20% of the companies were looking at the term "employability" from the hiring perspective: *"How many employees I need to hire to be able to take care of current projects"*. Also, skills match was mentioned for about 20%: *"How many employees we see that we can be hired"*. Adaptation and constant training were mentioned by about 15% of the companies: *"Ability to adapt to a job", "Ability to adapt to the context through regular training"*. From a company perspective, one aspect of "employability" was also the ability and ease of changing position: *"Ability of a person to find a job, keep it and eventually change if desired"*; which was mentioned by three respondents. Only two persons mentioned that the term was unknown: *"I have not heard such a term before. It sounds like a legal term"*.

When asked about the skills graduates and job seekers need in the current job market, companies identified that communication skills (N=39), problem-solving skills (N=39) and teamwork skills (N=37) are the most important. Interestingly, for French companies, expertise in one's own field is the most important skill to have (N=17). Companies estimated to somewhat find these mentioned skills in the graduates and job seekers (Average 6 from Likert scale 1 to 10), as most of them (N=25) selected 5 and 6 as an answer from the Likert scale 1 to 10. Nevertheless, companies from Finland



seem to find these skills in their students (average 8); whereas in Italy and France, the average is below 6.

As for the gap between the labour market and the educational system, companies found on average the gap to be significant (4.6) with most companies (N=13) answering 3. French and Italian companies estimate the gap to be rather wide (average 4.3 for France and 3 for Italy from Likert scale 1 to 10).



**The effects of COVID-19 pandemic.** About 55% of the companies saw the effects of COVID-19 negatively regarding the employability of graduates. The negative effects mentioned were e.g. the difficulty of finding time to train a young person, and the difficulty of young people to build a career with so much uncertainty. Also mentioned are the small number of recruitments, difficult to integrate new employees into teams, poorly supervised internships, lack of soft skills development, businesses working slowly, difficult to integrate a new employee into a remote environment team and ask them to work in a cooperative form, and less immersion in the company. We could interpret that not all companies have the competence and policies to integrate and engage new employees remotely. Instead, some companies see the transition to teleworking and employee orientation as a big challenge. The positive effects mentioned were the encouragement to study and develop skills, more applications for each job, and the fact that graduates are more qualified for digital work (positive effects were mentioned only from Iceland).



## IV. Conclusions

The term “employability” had very different interpretations among the respondents. Very often it was understood straight forward (“*ability to find or keep a job*”). Skills match as one aspect of employability was mentioned by all respondent groups. Educators and companies were sometimes emphasizing adaptation of employees. In all groups there were also people who said that they have not heard the term before.

There is some unbalance between the skills provided by the educational institutions and the needs of the job market. Educators mentioned that they are well aware of the needs of the job market which predicts that they collaborate with companies. At the same time, companies mentioned to somewhat find in students and recent graduates the skills they look for. It would be recommended for educational providers and educators to collect more feedback from the businesses regarding the type of skills they need. Students do feel like they are ready to enter the job market, though they seem undecided about starting their own company after graduation and becoming an entrepreneur does not seem to be the first and ultimate goal to be employed.

Educators would need more time and training to better assist students to enter the job market. Students would need more support to identify their weaknesses and work on them, but did identify that their educators are somewhat supportive regarding their employability. It could be recommended that educational institutions should put more emphasis towards career guidance to boost their students to find employment and ensure a smoother transition to the job market.

When looking at the effect of the pandemic for the respondents, we can see that educators are generally concerned about the employability of their students and believe that it will have a negative impact in the near future. Depending on the sector, companies also see negative effects on the number of recruitments and the commitment of new employees. On the other hand, all groups agreed that COVID pandemic has accelerated the use of digitalisation which gives the possibility to use new methods in learning such as gamification, supporting collaboration and innovation in general.



## V. Annexes

### Annex 1 – MCQ questionnaires

#### *Questions for students/VET participants*

- Which country are you from?
- Type of institution you are enrolled at:
  - Secondary school: VET school and high school
  - University
  - None
- What are your needs?
  - Graduation or certification
  - Upskill or reskill - professional transition
- Your gender:
  - Male
  - Female
  - Don't want to say
- What does the term "employability" mean to you?
- My institution supports me to define my career goals
  - Scale 1 to 10
- My institution supports me to identify my strengths and identify my own competences
  - Scale 1 to 10
- My institution supports me to identify my weaknesses and work on them
  - Scale 1 to 10
- My institution supports me to enter the job market
  - Scale 1 to 10
- How does your institution support you to enter the job market?
  - CV clinic
  - courses/conference on how to apply for a job
  - Recruitment interview training
  - Individual sessions with counselor
  - Info session on job requirements for specific fields (IT sector, hospitality, etc.)
  - Organisation of Job fairs to network with potential recruiters
  - Mentoring programme
  - Alumni
  - Other, what?
- How ready are you to enter the job market?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- In your opinion, what skills are required to successfully land a job after graduation?
  - Expertise in one's own field / competence in one's own field
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Argumentation skills



- Writing and presentation skills
- Communication skills
- Language skills (English or other foreign languages)
- Organizational skills
- Teamwork skills
- Business skills
- Problem solving skills
- Digital skills
- Suggestion of Other skills, please specify below
- If other, please specify
- Which skills from your studies would make you more employable?
- How supportive are your teachers regarding your employability
  - Scale 1 to 10
- Are you considering starting your own business after graduation?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- What impact, if any, do you think the COVID-19 Pandemic is having on your employability?

### *Questions for educators*

- Which country are you from?
- Field of teaching
  - Natural science
  - Engineering and technology
  - Medical and health services
  - Agricultural sciences
  - Social sciences
  - Humanities
  - Education
  - Business and marketing
  - Other
- Your main position
  - Teacher
  - Researcher
  - Guidance/career counsellor
  - Other
- Your gender
  - Male
  - Female
  - Don't want to say
- Your main work experience
  - 0-5 years
  - 6-10 years
  - 11-20 years
  - More than 20 years
- What does employability of students mean to you?
- I support my students in defining their career pathways
  - Scale 1 to 10



- I am equipped to support students to define their career pathways
  - Scale 1 to 10
- I am equipped to support students identify their strengths and competences
  - Scale 1 to 10
- How does your institution equip you to support students' employability?
- What would you need to foster your students' employability?
  - More time
  - Training
  - Peer support
  - Other... what?
- Have you considered introducing gamification in your activities to support students' employability?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- What are the main challenges you can identify regarding students/graduates' employability?
- How aware are you of the market needs?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected the employability of your students?

### *Questions for companies*

- Which country are you from?
- Size of your organisation
  - Individual
  - Small&Medium (SMEs)
  - Large
- Sector of your organisation
  - Agriculture, forestry and fishing
  - Manufacturing, mining and quarrying and other industry
  - Construction
  - Wholesale and retail trade, transportation and storage, accommodation and food service activities
  - Information and communication
  - High tech engineering industry
  - Financial and insurance activities
  - Real estate activities
  - Professional, scientific, technical, administration and support service activities
  - Public administration, defence, education, human health and social work activities
  - Other services
- What does the term employability mean to you?
- What skills do graduates and job seekers need in the current job market?
  - Expertise in one's own field / competence in one's own field
  - Critical thinking skills
  - Argumentation skills
  - Writing and presentation skills
  - Communication skills
  - Language skills (English or other foreign languages)
  - Organizational skills



- Teamwork skills
- Business skills
- Problem solving skills
- Digital skills
- Other skills, please specify below
- Do you find these skills currently in students and job seekers?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- From the list of skills from above, which skills are most lacking?
- What should educators do to ensure students are more employable when they graduate?
- Which demand for change can you identify that has emerged in relation to your cooperation with students within the last 5 years?
- How wide is the gap between the labour market and the educational system?
  - Scale 1 to 10
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected recruitment of graduates and their employability?



## VI. References

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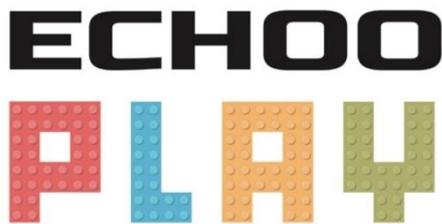
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Shaping Europe’s digital future, Policy, Countries’ performance in digitisation <https://ec.europa.eu/digital-single-market/en/countries-performance-digitisation>



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