EngageAll

EngageComp – A Competence Framework for Student Civic Engagement

EngageAll

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Executive Summary

This report introduces the EngageComp (Student Civic **Engage**ment **Comp**etences) framework as a competence framework for student civic engagement, intended for higher education institutions, policymakers, civic education practitioners, volunteer organisations, and teachers. It outlines competences that emerge through student civic engagement and offers practical guidance in addressing these and has been developed within the EngageAll initiative.

Context and Purpose:

Civic engagement is essential for strengthening democratic societies, fostering active citizenship, and promoting social cohesion. Higher education institutions have a pivotal role in supporting students to engage actively in civic and community activities, enhancing both their personal and professional competences. Student civic engagement activities strengthen students' ability to take socially responsible action, contribute to positive social change, and participate actively in democratic societies. Despite this potential, competence gained through student civic engagement remains underdeveloped, particularly in Professional Higher Education (PHE). The EngageAll Project addresses this gap by developing an inclusive competence-based approach that creates structured opportunities for participation across institutional initiatives, local community projects, and wider societal challenges, recognises PHE's diverse student body and the difficulty of balancing study with extracurricular engagement, and supports institutions to foster broader, more inclusive active citizenship. To achieve this, the project first develops a framework that outlines competences emerging through student civic engagement and offers practical guidance.

This report provides three main results:

1. A comprehensive Competence Framework identifying 21 clearly defined competences developed through student civic engagement and specific competences tailored to societal and civic contexts, such as Civic and Democratic Competence, Diversity and Intercultural competence, and Leadership competence.

2. A rigorous literature review that defines student civic engagement, situates it in current theory, identifies gaps, and provides a solid basis for the competence framework and its application.

3. An alignment of these competences with the European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) database, enhancing the visibility, transferability, and recognition of competences acquired through civic engagement.

Research Question and Theoretical Background

This report asks how higher education institutions can conceptualize and foster *student civic engagement* as a distinct domain of competence development. The guiding question is how such engagement not only strengthens democratic societies through social cohesion and active citizenship but also builds social capital, and which civic action translates into measurable learning outcomes and community impact.

Pedagogically, civic engagement resonates with experiential (Kolb, 1984), transformative (Mezirow, 1991), and situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991). These theories explain how active participation in real-world contexts deepens reflection, develops critical awareness, and embeds learning in authentic practices. From a sociological perspective, civic engagement creates and mobilises social capital (Coleman, 1988; Putnam, 2000), while Bourdieu's (1986) extended capital framework clarifies how engagement simultaneously generates social capital (networks and trust), cultural capital (civic literacies, public discourse competences, habitus), and symbolic capital (recognition and legitimacy). Structured opportunities for engagement thus yield not only skill development but also an accumulation of multiple capitals that strengthen both students and their institutions.

To capture these dynamics, competences are understood as *action competences*—self-organised dispositions that integrate knowledge, skills, and values into effective, responsible performance in unpredictable contexts (Weinert, 2001; Erpenbeck & von Rosenstiel, 2003; European Commission, 2022). Future Skills provide an appropriate framework: they describe the ability to solve complex problems in emergent contexts in a self-directed way, grounded in values and social responsibility (Ehlers, 2020; Ehlers & Eigbrecht, 2024). Civic engagement exemplifies such contexts, as it addresses societal transformation, requires ethical reasoning, and builds collective agency.

In sum, civic engagement in higher education is both a domain of competence development and a generator of multiple forms of capital. By emphasizing civic engagement, institutions can strengthen students' capacities to contribute to democratic life, build resilient communities, and act as agents of change. The EngageComp framework outlines the competences that emerge through student civic engagement and offers practical guidance in addressing these.

Methodological Design

In order to create the framework for student civic engagement competences, a comprehensive, mixed-methods approach was conducted, comprising:

- A systematic literature review that defines the term Student Civic Engagement
- A detailed analysis of over 50 international competence frameworks and policy documents.
- An extensive qualitative empirical study, including international expert interviews and student focus groups, complemented by feedback from Student Advisory Groups (SAGs).
- Validation within the consortium and among relevant stakeholders

Detailed Methods summary

1. **Exploratory workshop & Persona development:** One-day kickoff with faculty, students, and partner organisations. Pre-reads on definitions. Small-group tasks surfaced experiences and expectations. Output: six personas capturing motivations, barriers, and engagement patterns. Personas anchored initial competence identification.
2. **Systematic Literature Review:** PRISMA 2020 protocol. Scopus search: "civic participation" AND (university OR "higher education"). Inclusion: English/Spanish, 2000–2024, peer-reviewed studies and systematic reviews. Exclusion: non-peer-reviewed, grey literature,

incomplete reports. 113 records screened; 67 excluded; 46 included plus one project-related article = 47 empirical studies for analysis.

3. **Identification of Existing Frameworks:** Partners applied a shared protocol across databases, policy repositories, search engines, and grey literature (2000–). Multilingual keywords covered engagement, volunteering, student roles, service-learning competences, and skills. Results catalogued in a common template. Output: 38 frameworks/reports from 6 countries and EU level; full table in *Annex I*. Reflexive notes captured novel terms and documented methodological choices.
4. **Competence Identification and Consolidation:** Open, bottom-up coding of frameworks by multiple researchers. Non-competence items (pure knowledge/attitudes) removed. Overlaps merged. Output: concise set of action-oriented competences; volunteering activities listed separately.
5. **Competence Clustering & Coverage Analysis:** Competences mapped to the NextSkills structure (Ehlers, 2020) as an analytical grid to support comparability and integration. Mappings reviewed to detect under-represented NextSkills categories and competences that did not fit. Unplaced items flagged as potential new domains.
6. **Designing Framework Version 1:** Draft built on the desk research as well as the competence clustering and coverage analysis. Consortium feedback gathered before and during an on-site meeting. Consortium feedback gathered before and during an on-site meeting.
7. **Semi-Structured Expert Interviews and Focus Groups:** 17 Interviews conducted, 60-90 minutes online or in-person sessions (1–8 participants in each interview). Audio-recorded, transcribed, anonymised, translated. Topics: definitions, preliminary framework, reflection needs, enabling conditions, future visions.
8. **Qualitative Content Analysis and Validation:** Thematic-structuring content analysis (Rädiker & Kuckartz, 2020); iterative basic/fine coding and scheme adaptation. Findings integrated into the framework, circulated for feedback, discussed synchronously, and finalised after consensus validation.

The EngageComp Framework for Student Civic Engagement

The EngageComp-Framework describes the competences that students develop through activities such as volunteering, service-learning, and other forms of civic involvement. Such engagement fosters the enhancement of a broad spectrum of competences across individual, practice-oriented, and societal domains, equipping students to address emerging societal challenges and complex demands in both personal and professional contexts and take action towards desirable futures. Within this framework, **Civic and Democratic Competence** constitutes the central overarching competence, emerging from and reinforced by the competences described herein. However, civic competence cannot be conceptualized as a single competence; rather, it constitutes an overarching competence composed of multiple basic or cross-cutting competences into a cohesive whole, applicable capability to solve complex problems or act in real-world situations.

Civic and Democratic Competence is defined here as an action competence that enables democratic participation. It encompasses the ability and readiness to engage actively, responsibly,

and ethically in democratic and civic life through engagement in societal, practice-based, and individual contexts. This includes valuing democracy, human rights, cultural diversity, and equality, and combining participation skills with the motivation to contribute to democratic processes and social transformation.

The EngageComp Framework comprises three domains (Societal context, Practice context, Individual context) with 21 competences that can be assigned to these three areas, with Civic and Democratic Competence as an overarching competence that is based on the respective competences. Figure 1 provides an integrated visualisation of the EngageComp - Framework, positioning the competences across three competence domains.

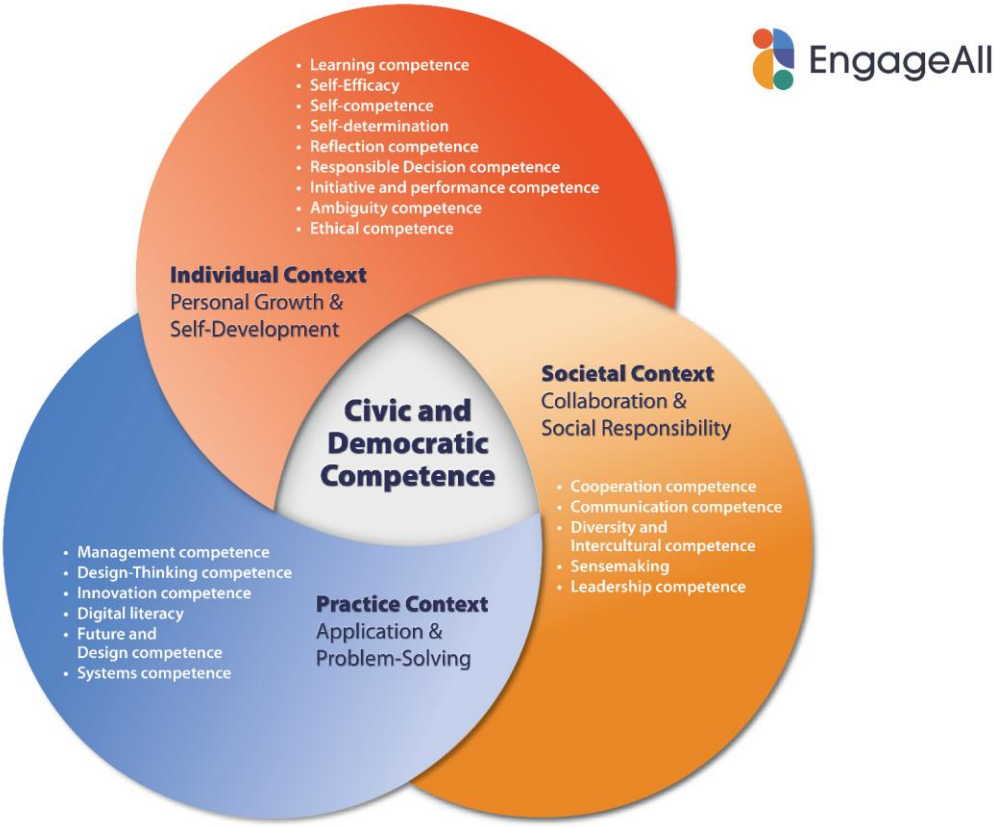

Figure 1: The EngageComp Framework (Executive summary)

Key Take-Aways, Implications & Next Steps

The Competence Framework serves as foundational components for subsequent project activities. It will underpin the development of practical toolkits, guidelines, and structured reflection materials designed to support students in recognizing, articulating, and enhancing their competences, developed through student civic engagement. Furthermore, the project will implement structured pilot interventions, including a student ambassador scheme and specialized courses, promoting inclusive and active student civic participation within partner institutions and beyond. The framework may assist stakeholders in:

- designing reflection opportunities for competence development through student civic engagement
- designing training offers and adapting existing engagement programmes
- promoting student civic engagement

EngageComp provides a clear, actionable framework to recognise and develop competences gained through student civic engagement across societal, practice, and individual domains, with Civic and Democratic Competence at the core. Built on a mixed-methods design it translates evidence into 21 competence profiles with reference competences for design, reflection, and assessment.

1 Introduction

Student Civic Engagement constitutes an essential foundation of democratic societies, contributing significantly to social cohesion, active citizenship, and community development. Particularly within higher education, Student Civic Engagement strengthens social cohesion and active citizenship by increasing volunteering, political participation, and pro-civic attitudes, particularly when structured through service-learning (Astin et al., 2000; Brand, 2010; Eyler & Giles, 1999). At the community level, university-community partnerships report tangible gains, enhanced organizational capacity, improved services, and stronger links of student engagement to community development (Gelmon et al., 2001). Student civic engagement provides a distinctive experiential learning context, facilitating the development and enhancement of both general and context-specific Future Skills, such as Diversity and Intercultural competence, Civic and Democratic competence or Leadership competence. For illustration, students may organise neighbourhood clean-ups and donation drives within a community service module, then reflect on planning, teamwork, and impact; likewise, a civic participation project can involve peer voter registration and non-partisan information sessions on local issues, with documentation of how communication and collaboration competences develop through the process. Despite its educational value, competence development through civic engagement remains largely underrepresented in higher education curricula (Brunner et al., 2021). The EngageAll Project addresses this gap by developing an inclusive competence-based approach that creates structured opportunities for participation across institutional initiatives, local community projects, and wider societal challenges, recognises PHE's diverse student body and the difficulty of balancing study with extracurricular engagement, and supports institutions to foster broader, more inclusive active citizenship. To achieve this, the project first develops a framework that outlines competences emerging through student civic engagement and offers practical guidance. The Competence Framework serves as foundational components for subsequent project activities. It will underpin the development of practical toolkits, guidelines, and structured reflection materials designed to support students in recognizing, articulating, and enhancing their competences, developed through student civic engagement.

This report, focused specifically on the foundational research phase of the EngageAll project, systematically addresses this gap by identifying student roles and associated activities within civic contexts, and exploring their connection to Future Skills development. The primary goal of this report is to describe the research process and outcomes to theoretically and empirically design a Competence Framework for Student Civic Engagement.

The research process follows a structured methodological approach including a systematic literature review, an extensive analysis of international competence frameworks, and a qualitative empirical study for developing a comprehensive Competence Framework for student civic engagement. This framework defines competences directly aligned with student civic engagement learning opportunities. Furthermore, it provides a proposal for a reflection guideline aimed at assisting students in recognizing and articulating their civic learning outcomes, thereby establishing a foundation for subsequent project activities.

2 Theoretical and Methodological Approach

This chapter first clarifies the theoretical lenses that define student civic engagement as a domain of action competences situated and then outlines the research process that led to the final EngageComp framework.

2.1 Theoretical Background

Research Question

How can higher education institutions effectively conceptualize and foster student civic engagement as a distinct domain of competence development, one that not only strengthens democratic societies through social cohesion and active citizenship but also builds social capital, and what theoretical lenses (including Bourdieu's forms of capital) best illuminate the processes by which civic engagement translates into measurable learning outcomes and broader community impact?

Theoretical Background

Civic engagement sits at the intersection of educational theory and sociology. From a pedagogical standpoint, experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) and transformative learning (Mezirow, 1991) underscore how active participation in community projects fosters deeper reflection, critical consciousness, and identity development. Situated learning (Lave & Wenger, 1991) further highlights that competencies emerge through legitimate peripheral participation in social practices, making civic activities prime sites for authentic learning.

Sociological theories of social capital (Putnam, 2000; Coleman, 1988) posit that networks of reciprocity and trust strengthen communal ties and enable collective action. Pierre Bourdieu's extended framework refines this by distinguishing three relevant forms of capital:

- **Social Capital**: The aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to membership in networks and groups. Student civic engagement expands these networks, granting access to information, support, and collective voice.
- **Cultural Capital**: The dispositions, knowledge, and competencies internalized through socialization. Participating in civic initiatives endows students with the linguistic codes, norms, and "habitus" valued in public deliberation and leadership roles.
- **Symbolic Capital**: The recognition and prestige conferred by institutions and communities. Successful civic contributions can translate into reputational gains for both students and their institutions, reinforcing legitimacy and authority.

By viewing civic engagement through Bourdieu's (1986) lens, structured opportunities for participation can be understood as developing not only "skills" in the narrow sense but also accumulate multiple forms of capital: social ties (social), civic literacies and public discourse competencies (cultural), enhanced standing among peers and stakeholders (symbolic). These intertwined processes enrich students' capacities and position them as agents within both educational and societal fields.

In general, the authors understand the concept of competences as **action competences,** referring to the capacity to organize oneself responsibly and proactively across different professional contexts**,**

in a manner appropriate to both the task at hand and one's own well-being. Competences are frequently described as dispositions to act, meaning they represent an individual's potential ability to respond effectively to situational demands (Weinert, 2001). Crucially, a person's true competence becomes evident only through real-life performance: competencies have been called *"realized abilities"* that manifest when knowledge and skills are successfully applied in unpredictable, real-world contexts (Connell et al., 2003).

Competences combine knowledge, skills, and values into an integrated capacity for action (European Commission, 2022). Knowledge and skills form the *capacity to act* ("can do"), while knowledge combined with values underpins the *willingness to act* ("will do"). Erpenbeck and von Rosenstiel (2003) describe competencies as self-organizational dispositions, enabling individuals to apply what they know and can do independently, even in novel or complex situations. In summary, a competent individual not only possesses the necessary factual knowledge and skills, but is also guided by appropriate values and attitudes, enabling effective and responsible action across diverse situations. Civic engagement requires more than motivation and goodwill; it demands critical thinking, communication, collaboration, adaptability, and ethical reasoning.

For students to actively engage in civic participation and contribute to their communities in meaningful ways, they require a set of future-oriented competences that enable them to navigate complexity, collaborate effectively, and drive social change.

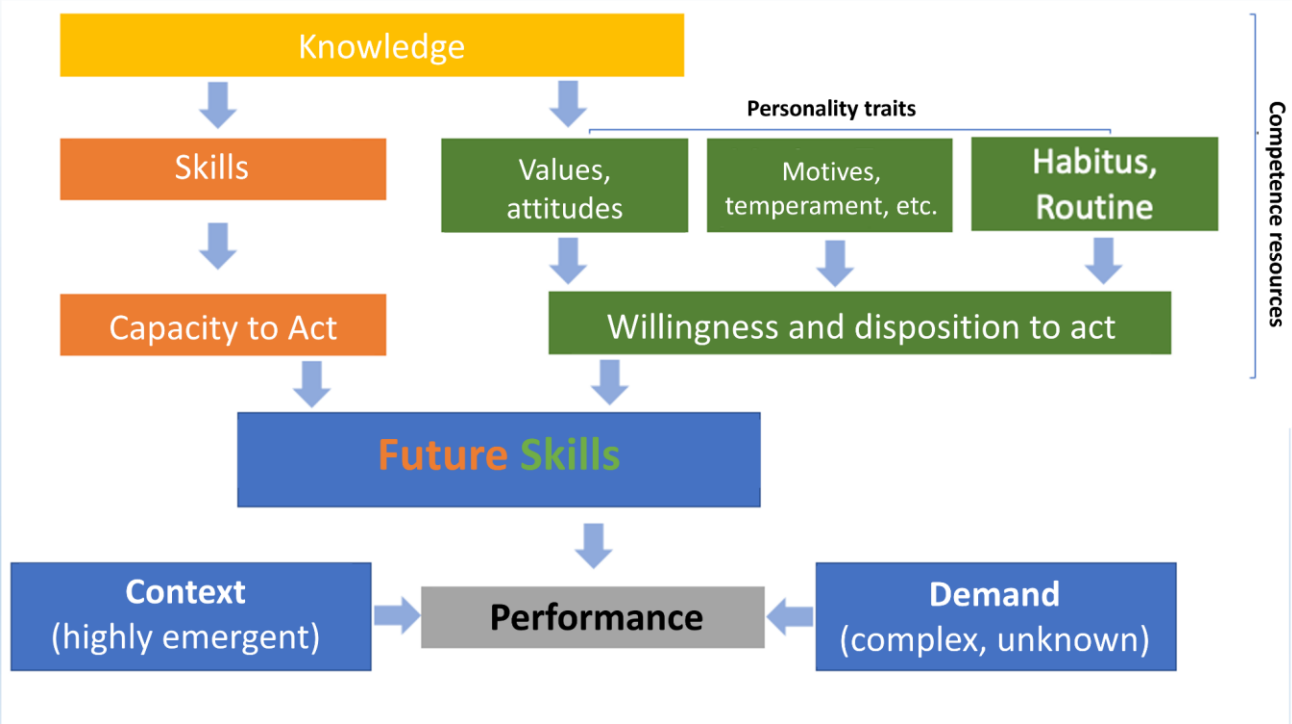

Figure 2: Competence structure model for Future Skills (Ehlers, 2020)

These competences, often referred to as *Future Skills*, go beyond traditional academic knowledge and focus on abilities that prepare students for an uncertain, rapidly changing world (Ehlers 2020; Ehlers & Eigbrecht, 2024). Future Skills can be defined as "competences that allow individuals to solve complex problems in highly emergent contexts of action in a self-organised way and enable them to act (successfully). They are based on cognitive, motivational, volitional and social resources,

are value-based and can be acquired in a learning process" (Ehlers 2020, p. 53). This definition focuses on the emergent nature of challenges that learners can be faced with in different contexts of action - this holds specifically true for civic engagement which is often closely linked to societal questions and transformation, as well as on the component of values which can be a strong factor for getting involved in engagement contexts. With its future focus, this definition is suitable for contexts where action is taken towards change and transformation - and it entails that Future Skills can be further developed through civic engagement.

Future Skills are not only essential for effective civic participation but also align with the broader role of universities in preparing students to be active, engaged citizens (Ehlers, 2020). By integrating these competencies into higher education curricula, institutions can empower students to take initiative, collaborate effectively, and contribute to social progress.

2.2 Research Process

Building on this foundation, the EngageComp Framework was developed through a structured, multi-step methodological process, involving project partners, students and experts. The research process combines a PRISMA-guided literature review and a structured scan of international frameworks with expert and student interviews and focus groups, followed by a rigorous qualitative analysis.

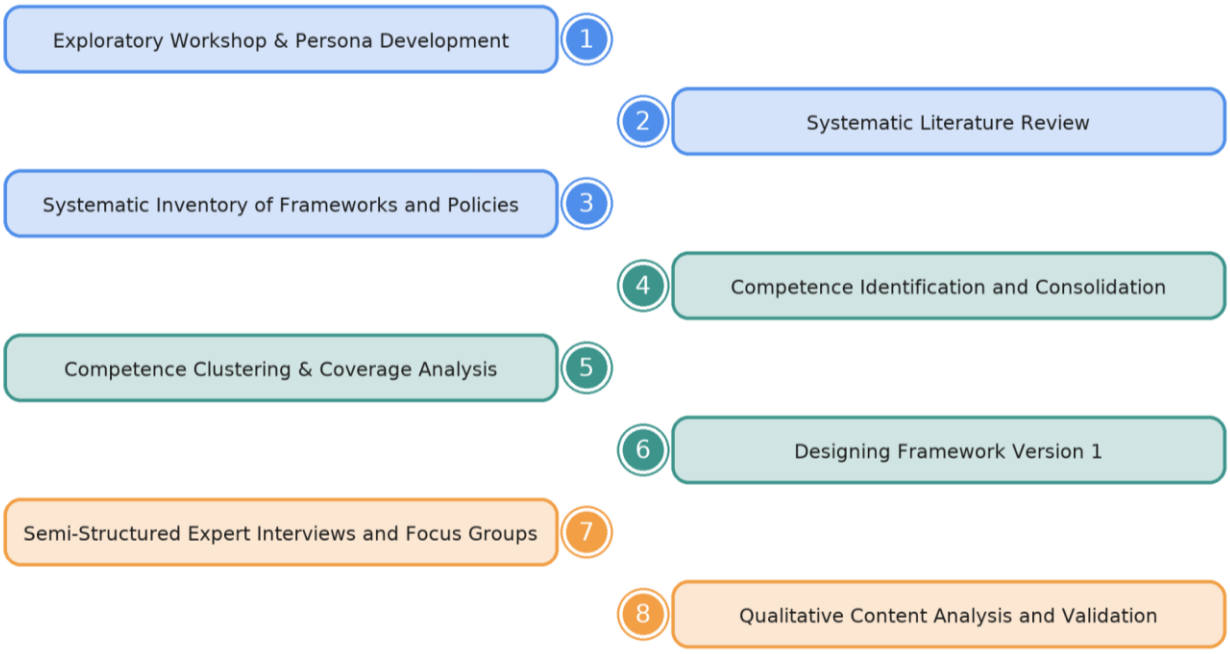

Figure 3: Visualisation Research Process

Step 1: Exploratory Workshop and Persona development

To establish a shared baseline understanding of *student civic engagement*, the EngageAll project team conducted a structured, one-day kick-off workshop with key project stakeholders—including faculty members, student representatives, and partner organization delegates. Prior to the event,

participants received preparatory materials summarizing prevailing definitions and theoretical perspectives on civic engagement. During the workshop, we facilitated small-group discussions and guided exercises to elicit participants' experiences, expectations, and conceptualizations of student engagement in community contexts. Based on these exchanges, the project team collaboratively drafted six representative personas - each embodying distinct motivations, barriers, and engagement patterns. These personas served as analytic anchors for identifying an initial set of competences linked to student civic participation and laid the groundwork for the development of the Competence Framework.

Step 2: Systematic Literature Review

A thorough literature review is crucial for conceptualizing "student civic engagement," as it grounds the term within existing scholarly discourses, clarifies its definitional boundaries, and highlights relevant theoretical frameworks. By systematically examining prior research, the literature review identifies gaps and evolving perspectives, ensuring that the operationalization of student civic engagement aligns with contemporary understanding and addresses pertinent dimensions such as social responsibility, community involvement, and democratic participation. Consequently, this informed foundation facilitates the development of a robust, theoretically substantiated competence framework, capable of effectively guiding educational practice and empirical inquiry.

To conduct the systematic qualitative review described, the PRISMA 2020 protocol (Page et al., 2021) was followed to guide the analytical process. Initially, to compile the most relevant articles on the topic and gather global perspectives, a search was conducted using the English-language database Scopus (https://www.scopus.com/).The search formula used was: "civic participation" AND (university OR "higher education")

Before beginning the selection process, the following inclusion and exclusion criteria were established:

Inclusion criteria:

- Articles published in English or Spanish that included all the search terms in the title or abstract.
- Articles published between 2000 and 2024.
- Peer-reviewed research studies and systematic reviews.

Exclusion criteria:

- Articles that did not meet the inclusion criteria.
- Book chapters, theses, reports, and other bibliographic sources.
- Experience reports and incomplete articles.

Following these criteria, articles were screened based on their titles and abstracts. A total of **113 articles** were initially identified as relevant. After reviewing the abstracts, **67 articles** were excluded for not meeting the inclusion criteria.

Ultimately, **46 articles** met all the criteria and were selected for the eligibility review. One additional article, developed by a research group involving a member of EngageAll, was also included. In total, **47 empirical articles** published between 2000 and 2024 were included in the final systematic review. The results are presented in Chapter 3.

Step 3: Systematic Inventory of Frameworks and Policies

To assemble a comprehensive overview of competence frameworks addressing student civic engagement, each project partner was provided with a detailed research protocol outlining our inclusion criteria, search questions, and core keywords. Partners were instructed to survey scholarly databases, policy repositories, search engines and grey-literature archives for documents published from 2000 onward that explicitly dealt with student engagement, civic participation, volunteering roles, service-learning competences, and related skills frameworks. In practice, this meant translating the following base terms “volunteering positions,” “student engagement,” “civic participation,” “student organisations,” “elected representative positions,” “community volunteering,” “service-learning competences,” “competences,” and “skills” into the respective languages and search syntaxes for each national and regional context (in the case of EURASHE and ESU, European/international frameworks and reports).

Once identified, each report or framework was catalogued in a shared spreadsheet template. For every source, partners recorded bibliographic details (title, author, institution, year, document type, country), the exact search terms that yielded the result, and a concise English summary of its most important or relevant passages (translated into English), relevant competences, occurring volunteering roles and activities, competence framework structures, target groups and contextual conditions. 38 reports and frameworks from 6 Countries (Belgium, USA, Canada, Germany, UK, Malta) and at European level were described and analyzed this way. For a complete tabular overview of the analyzed frameworks, see Annex I.

Reflecting on the research process, the research team recognized that the keyword selection both structured and limited what was found: while it helped ensure consistency across ten country contexts, it also risked omitting emergent terms that fall outside our initial glossary. To mitigate this, partners were encouraged to note any novel descriptors encountered—an iterative, reflexive practice that enhanced the breadth of our capture. A tension between breadth and depth also had to be confronted: the wide net secured many frameworks, but inevitably required subsequent filtering and critical appraisal to focus on those most directly relevant to student civic engagement. Finally, by explicitly documenting each methodological choice, both the transparency and the trustworthiness of our review was bolstered, laying a rigorously documented foundation for the subsequent development of our Competence Framework.

Step 4: Competence Identification and Consolidation

After compiling an initial corpus of competence frameworks through systematic database and grey-literature searches, an open, bottom-up coding process was conducted, whereby multiple researchers independently examined a representative subset of documents to identify recurring competence descriptors, role definitions, and contextual features. The objective of this step was to extract and compile all relevant competencies related to student civic engagement from these models, as well as some meta-information and information on framework conditions, activities, roles, contexts. At this

stage, no differentiation regarding conceptual definitions of competences was made. In the subsequent step, items that did not qualify as competences in the narrow sense—such as those related predominantly to knowledge or attitudes—were excluded. This ensured that only competences within the scope of the provided definition remained within the preliminary framework. Similar or overlapping competences were consolidated to eliminate redundancies, resulting in a clear and concise set of defined competences. Activities related to volunteering were compiled in a separate list.

Step 5: Competence Clustering & Coverage Analysis

Following the selective reduction, a systematic clustering process was undertaken. Competences were categorized according to the competence structure model provided by the NextSkills framework (Ehlers, 2020). The selection of this framework was done because it offers a scientifically grounded and clearly structured approach to categorizing competencies as it is a competence structure model (ibid.), supporting comparability and integration of the current analytical results. Identified competences from the frameworks were assigned accordingly to the relevant categories provided by the NextSkills framework. It served as an analysis grid and was enhanced in the following step.

In the next step, the assigned competences were systematically reviewed. This review aimed to identify which categories from the NextSkills framework were represented by the competences and which categories were potentially lacking representation. Furthermore, competences that could not be clearly categorized within the existing structure of the NextSkills framework were separately analyzed. These uncategorizable competencies were specifically examined to highlight possible new competence domains not adequately reflected in the NextSkills competence model.

Step 6: Designing Framework Version 1

On the basis of the NextSkills framework and with a special focus on competences that could not be directly associated to Future Skills profiles in this framework, a preliminary framework was drafted, highlighting the emerging competences from the literature analysis. Special attention was paid to emergent competences identified from the literature analysis, particularly Intercultural Competence and Entrepreneurship Competence along with Citizenship Competence, the latter deemed as central to student civic engagement. Feedback on the preliminary framework was solicited from consortium partners in advance and subsequently discussed during an on-site meeting.

Step 7: Semi-Structured Expert Interviews and Focus Groups

Consortium partners conducted either focus group or expert interviews, adapting the general outline to their specific contexts while covering central thematic areas. Groups comprised 3–8 participants, conducted online or face-to-face, lasting approximately 60–90 minutes. All discussions were recorded, transcribed using intelligent verbatim, anonymized, and translated. Topics included: introduction and icebreaker; definition and understanding of student civic engagement; competence discussion based on the preliminary framework; needs for supporting student competence reflection; future framework conditions and visions for student engagement; and wrap-up discussion. The resulting transcripts provided the foundation for the subsequent qualitative analysis.

Step 8: Qualitative content Analysis & Validation

The transcripts underwent rigorous qualitative content analysis following Rädiker & Kuckartz's (2020) thematic-structuring approach as it provides a concise and strongly structured guideline for the analysis of the interviews and focus groups. The data was systematically analyzed through iterative processes of basic and fine coding and the adaptation of the coding scheme. The primary aims of the process were to integrate empirical evidence into previous desk-based research, triangulate data sources, incorporate the perspectives of students and experts, derive insights from authentic experiences, and deepen overall understanding of student civic engagement competences.

The results of this analysis were integrated into the preliminary framework, which was subsequently revised. The revised version was then circulated among consortium partners and relevant stakeholders. In a synchronous discussion, feedback was gathered to ensure accuracy, relevance, and completeness. This process concluded with the final validation of the competence framework to guarantee its optimal quality and suitability as a framework for student civic engagement.

3 Systematic Literature Review for a Theoretical Framework on Student Civic Engagement

The following chapter presents the results of the Systematic Literature Review for a theoretical framework on the concept of civic engagement and the role of Higher Education Institutions in its development, and, on this basis, sets out a working definition of how Student Civic Engagement is understood within the EngageAll project.

3.1. Introduction and Conceptual Foundations

The following section outlines the key dimensions of civic engagement as they relate to higher education institutions. Civic engagement refers to the ways individuals become actively involved in improving conditions within their communities. It encompasses both political and non-political actions, and its aim is to support the common good through participation, collaboration, and social responsibility.

In the context of higher education institutions, civic engagement is seen as a means of fostering not only personal growth but also collective awareness. The concept includes activities that go beyond the classroom and connect learners with real-world challenges. There is no universally agreed definition of civic engagement, and it is often used interchangeably with civic participation. However, the two terms emphasize slightly different aspects: participation refers rather to the actions themselves, while engagement implies a broader commitment and sense of responsibility.

3.2. Core Concepts: Civic Participation and Civic Engagement

Civic participation involves individuals engaging in activities that benefit society outside their private and professional spheres. It includes both structured actions such as voting or volunteering, and underlying attitudes such as trust or prosocial values. Participation generates mutual benefits,

contributing to both individual development and the well-being of the community. However, these opportunities are not equally distributed; social and economic inequalities can shape who participates and how (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Evans et al., 2021; Putnam, 1993; Verba et al., 1995;).

Civic engagement, closely related to participation, refers to the conscious involvement of individuals in public life, often through democratic channels, collective actions, or collaboration with organizations (Adler & Goggin, 2005; Warren et al., 2014). It implies a deeper and more sustained commitment to addressing social issues and contributing to community development.

A distinction can also be made between general student engagement and student civic engagement. While the former focuses on academic involvement (Ashwin & McVitty, 2015), the latter highlights students' contributions to their communities through partnerships and voluntary actions, often within or supported by higher education institutions (Adler & Goggin, 2005).

3.3. Evolution of the Concept

The understanding of civic participation has changed over time. Earlier definitions emphasized formal and institutional involvement, but more recent interpretations include informal and digital forms of participation (Bennet & Givens, 2008; Stolle & Hooghe, 2005). The use of digital tools, particularly social media, has expanded the ways in which individuals, especially young people, engage in public life. These new modes of involvement allow for sharing information, organizing collective efforts, and participating in causes in more flexible and horizontal ways.

Today’s patterns of civic participation are less tied to traditional institutions and more focused on issue-based, autonomous actions. Rather than being passive or disengaged, many individuals now participate in ways that are decentralized and driven by personal conviction (Cnaan & Park, 2016; Hustinx, et al., 2003; Schudson,1998). This transformation is evident in the shift toward individual or small-group efforts that maintain a strong connection to community and social concerns.

3.4. The Role of Higher Education Institutions in Promoting Civic Engagement

Higher education institutions are expected to play an active role in promoting civic responsibility. Beyond preparing students for employment or academic advancement, they are also responsible for fostering the development of socially aware and active individuals. Civic engagement contributes to this goal by encouraging critical thinking, cooperation, empathy, and a commitment to social justice.

These institutions have the capacity to create meaningful opportunities for students to participate in activities that contribute to the public good. Through such experiences, students not only enhance their academic learning but also develop personal and interpersonal competencies. Civic engagement, when intentionally integrated into educational settings, supports the formation of individuals capable of addressing complex societal challenges with a collaborative and inclusive mindset.

Participation also strengthens social ties within and beyond the institution. It promotes mutual trust and shared responsibility, and it contributes to the creation of networks that support both individual

and collective growth (Putnam, 1993). By embedding civic engagement into their educational mission, higher education institutions reinforce their social relevance and commitment to democratic values.

3.5. Methodological Considerations for Implementation and Analysis

Civic engagement in higher education institutions can be promoted through different educational strategies, both within and outside formal curricula (Coates, 2006; Lessky et al., 2024; Mann, 2001; Melkumyan et al., 2015). The distinction between curricular and extracurricular approaches lies mainly in the level of institutional recognition. Curricular initiatives are formally integrated into academic programs and contribute to the accumulation of academic credits (such as ECTS in the European system), whereas extracurricular activities are usually voluntary and may or may not be acknowledged through non-formal certificates or supplements.

Among the curricular methodologies, service-learning stands out as a key strategy. This approach connects academic learning with community involvement, allowing students to apply theoretical knowledge to real-world challenges. It positions students as active participants in processes that respond to specific community needs. By collaborating with external organizations, students contribute to social initiatives while developing critical thinking, civic responsibility, and empathy (Astin & Sax, 1998; Bär et al., 2023; Eyler et al., 1997)

Extracurricular activities also play an important role in fostering civic engagement within higher education institutions. Volunteering, both in formal structures and through informal or student-led initiatives, enables students to contribute to causes of public interest and develop transferable skills. These experiences support the development of civic consciousness, intercultural competence, and ethical reasoning, while also reinforcing personal growth and social responsibility (McIlrath & Tansey, 2013).

In both curricular and extracurricular contexts, the promotion of civic engagement within higher education institutions is linked to learning through practice and reflection. These strategies contribute to shaping active citizens who are capable of addressing social challenges collaboratively and with a strong sense of equity and justice.

This theoretical framework explores the concept of civic participation, its evolution and its importance in higher education, with special attention to the development of competencies and social impact. Civic participation is fundamental for an active and democratic society. It is the way in which citizens get involved in the life of their communities to improve conditions for others. Universities have a crucial role to play in the formation of active citizens, promoting their social commitment. There is no single definition of civic participation and civic engagement and they are often used to talk about the same thing, although there are differences between them.

For the EngageAll project and as a foundation for further implementation, we agreed on the following understanding, based on the literature analysis:

> *Civic participation is fundamental to an active and democratic society: it is how citizens involve themselves in community life to improve conditions for others. Within this landscape, universities have a crucial role in the formation of active citizens by promoting social*

> *commitment and creating authentic opportunities to contribute. Student civic engagement, through collaborations between students and organizations within and beyond the higher-education context, explicitly aims at supporting others and serving the community. In doing so, it facilitates the development of civic responsibility and democratic values, including human rights, respect, and social inclusion.*

Building on this consolidated theoretical perspective and working definition, the following chapter broadens the evidence base by presenting the results of the systematic inventorying of existing frameworks and policies that operationalise competences, roles and activities for student civic engagement across diverse institutional and policy contexts.

4 Systematic Inventory of Frameworks and Policies

To assemble a comprehensive overview of competence frameworks addressing student civic engagement, each project partner was provided with a detailed research protocol outlining our inclusion criteria, search questions, and core keywords. Partners were instructed to survey scholarly databases, policy repositories, search engines and grey-literature archives for documents published from 2000 onward that explicitly dealt with student engagement, civic participation, volunteering roles, service-learning competences, and related skills frameworks. In practice, this meant translating the following base terms “volunteering positions,” “student engagement,” “civic participation,” “student organisations,” “elected representative positions,” “community volunteering,” “service-learning competences,” “competences,” and “skills” into the respective languages and search syntaxes for each national and regional context (in the case of EURASHE and ESU, European/international frameworks and reports). For a complete overview of all frameworks, report found, see *Annex I: Overview Frameworks Desk Research*.

Once identified, each report or framework was catalogued in a shared spreadsheet template. For every source, partners recorded bibliographic details (title, author, institution, year, document type, country), the exact search terms that yielded the result, and a concise English summary of its most important or relevant passages (translated into English), relevant competences, occurring volunteering roles and activities, competence framework structures, target groups and contextual conditions. 38 reports and frameworks from 6 Countries (Belgium, USA, Canada, Germany, UK, Malta) and at European level were described and analyzed this way. For a complete tabular overview of the analysed frameworks, see *Annex I* in the Appendix.

Reflecting on the research process, the research team recognized that the keyword selection both structured and limited what was found: while it helped ensure consistency across ten country contexts, it also risked omitting emergent terms that fall outside our initial glossary. To mitigate this, partners were encouraged to note any novel descriptors encountered—an iterative, reflexive practice that enhanced the breadth of our capture. A tension between breadth and depth also had to be confronted: the wide net secured many frameworks, but inevitably required subsequent filtering and critical appraisal to focus on those most directly relevant to student civic engagement. Finally, by explicitly documenting each methodological choice, both the transparency and the trustworthiness of our

review was bolstered, laying a rigorously documented foundation for the subsequent development of our competence framework.

5 Analysis of Reports and Frameworks

After compiling an initial corpus of competence frameworks through systematic database and grey-literature searches, an open, bottom-up coding process was conducted whereby multiple researchers independently examined a representative subset of documents to identify recurring competence descriptors, role definitions, and contextual features. The objective of this step was to extract and compile all relevant competences related to student civic engagement from these models, as well as some meta-information and information on framework conditions, activities, roles, contexts. This chapter presents the results of the analysis, starting with the competence clustering and coverage analysis, followed by the identified roles and activities.

5.1 Competence Clustering & Coverage Analysis

In the first step, no differentiation regarding conceptual definitions of competences was made. In the subsequent step, items that did not qualify as competences in the narrow sense — such as those related predominantly to knowledge or attitudes — were excluded. This ensured that only competences within the scope of the provided definition remained within the preliminary framework. Similar or overlapping competences were consolidated to eliminate redundancies, resulting in a clear and concise set of defined competences. Activities related to volunteering were compiled in a separate list. Following the selective reduction, a systematic clustering process was undertaken. Competences were categorized according to the competence structure model provided by the NextSkills framework (Ehlers, 2020). The selection of this framework was done because it offers a scientifically grounded and clearly structured approach to categorizing competencies as it is a competence structure model (ibid.), supporting comparability and integration of the current analytical results. Identified competences from the frameworks were assigned accordingly to the relevant categories provided by the NextSkills framework, which served as an analysis grid. In the next step, the assigned competences were systematically reviewed. This review aimed to identify which categories from the NextSkills framework were represented by the competences and which categories were potentially lacking representation. Furthermore, competences that could not be clearly categorized within the existing structure of the NextSkills framework were separately analyzed. These uncategorizable competencies were specifically examined to highlight possible new competence domains not adequately reflected in the NextSkills competence model.

For clarity and readability, the sources of the competences identified from the frameworks are referenced by numerical identifiers that map to *Annex I Overview of Frameworks Desk Research*. This numbering enables each extracted competence to be directly linked to its respective source.

Table 1: Competence Clustering & Coverage Analysis

Competence Categories from the NextSkills Framework	Competences & Skills from the Frameworks & Reports
Learning Literacy	• Learning to learn competence [2; 14; 18; 23; 27; 37] • The ability to learn to learn, to manage and shape one's own learning and to reflect on oneself [2; 3; 6; 18; 19; 23; 24; 27; 28; 31; 37] • Willingness to learn [2; 14; 16; 18; 23; 27; 28; 37]
Self-Efficacy	• Professional demeanor [27; 28; 29] • Having confidence in one's ability to achieve personal and societal goals [4; 6; 12; 18; 19; 23; 24; 29; 31] • Believing that individual actions can bring about meaningful change [4; 6; 12; 18; 19; 23; 24; 29; 31]
Self-determination	• Assertiveness [14; 27; 28] • Endurance [27; 28] • Perseverance [27; 28] • Self-assertion [4; 6; 12; 28]
Self-competence	• Good organisational and multitasking skills [14; 24; 27; 28; 31] • Self-regulation [27; 28; 31] • Self-responsibility [18; 27; 28; 38] • Time management [24; 27; 28; 31]
Reflective competence	• Ability to accept/handle criticism /challenge their own biases [27; 28; 35] • Having a deep understanding of your interests, values, skills, limitations, feelings and motives [18; 26; 27; 28; 31; 35] • Reflective Self-Awareness: Knowing one's strengths, interests, and goals while being open to self-improvement. [1; 3; 18; 23; 26; 27; 28; 29; 31; 35; 38] • Developing well-founded personal positions and critically questioning one's own perspectives [3; 14; 18; 26; 35; 38]
Decision competence	• Analytic skills: Application of knowledge of political and civic issues in order to interpret political debates and decision making, identify contrasting perspectives, recognize potential solutions to problems, and respond to hypothetical situations presented in case studies of issues or texts from media sources (in print or online) [18; 21; 23; 24; 27; 28; 31] • Decision-making ability [1; 21; 27; 28; 31] • Democratic decision making [21; 31; 33] • Identifying reliable information sources and critically evaluating different perspectives. Making reasoned decisions based on facts rather than assumptions [18; 23; 27; 28; 29; 31] • Participatory or involvement skills: Ability to make reasoned judgments about situations of group involvement or political

	problem solving in a community or other setting [31; 33] • Problem Solving [2; 14; 19; 27; 28; 35; 37]
Initiative and performance competence	• Ability to take initiative & sense of initiative [19; 27; 28; 30] • The ability to stay involved and motivated while performing activities. To be and stay engaged in difficulties and adversities you also need resilience [14; 26] • Goal-oriented action [19; 24; 27; 28; 30; 31] • Initiating & implementing change [19; 27; 28; 33] • Willingness to perform [19; 27; 28; 30]
Ambiguity competence	• Ability to navigate structures [27; 28; 35] • Manage transitions and uncertainty, and to face challenges [18; 26; 27; 28; 29; 35] • It means not only to have the capability to stay focused on goals, but easily adjust on how to achieve them. It also means to adapt to varied roles and responsibilities [18; 26; 27; 28; 29; 35] • Having flexibility in handling change, being able to juggle multiple demands, and adapting to new situations with fresh ideas or innovative approaches [14; 18; 26; 27; 28; 35] • Navigate ambiguity, embrace uncertainty, working effectively in a climate of ambiguity and changing priorities [29; 35] • Stress management & resilience [14; 24; 26; 27; 28; 35] • Tolerance for Ambiguity and Uncertainty: Being able to endure ambiguous or uncertain situations and contradictory perspectives. [14; 18; 27; 28; 29; 35]
Ethical competence	• Critical reasoning about causes and morality [18; 19; 29; 31; 38] • Ethical & Sustainable Thinking: assess the consequences and impact of ideas, opportunities and actions. [3; 18; 26; 29; 30; 31; 33; 35; 38] • Attitudes, behaviours, values and mindset necessary to take ethical decisions and act sustainably. Taking into consideration people's wellbeing and the ecosystem. [3; 18; 26; 29; 30; 31; 33; 35; 38] • Professional and ethical practice: Understanding legislation and policy, Addressing ethical issues, Supports the inclusion of the person's and their designated family and/or caregiver's beliefs and values [3; 24; 31; 33; 38] • Maintaining boundaries, Contributing to quality improvement [3; 24; 31; 33; 38]
Design-thinking competence	• Critical, logical, analytical thinking, Conceptual skills [1; 2; 18; 27; 28; 31; 37] • Gathering and evaluation of data, isolating possible contributing circumstances, evaluating possible risks, and pinpoint what needs to be addressed for a resolution and plan alternatives. Evaluate potential costs, required resources, and possible barriers to successfully solving the problem [14; 23; 24; 25; 26; 31] • Inclusive problem-solving approach [19; 26; 27; 28;31; 35]

Innovation competence	• Creativity encompasses the processes leading to the generation of new ideas to create value for individuals and organisations. Creativity is the capability or act of conceiving something original or unusual [25; 26] • Implementation of something new, it is creativity mobilised for action. Innovation introduces ideas, processes, products or procedures which are new to that job, work team or organisation, and which are designed to benefit the job, the work team or the organisation [25; 26] • Problem-solving skills [2; 14; 19; 26; 27; 28; 35; 37]
Digital literacy	• Digital awareness: being aware of the (in)competences of yourself and others [1; 2; 37] • Digital competence: the responsible use of digital technologies; communication and collaboration, media literacy, digital content creation, safety, problem solving and critical thinking [1; 2; 18; 24; 24; 27; 28; 30; 31; 33; 37] • Digital discipline: using the digital environment efficiently and purposefully [1; 24; 31; 33] • Digital self-reliance: being able to move smoothly and confidently in the digital world [1; 2; 18; 24; 24; 31; 37] • Media Literacy: ability to access, have a critical understanding of, and interact with both traditional and new forms of media and understand the role and functions of media in democratic societies. [1; 2; 18; 19; 23; 27; 28; 30; 31; 33; 37]
Future and design competence	• Future readiness & foresight [23; 27; 28; 31] • Forward-thinking [23; 27; 28; 33]
Systems competence	• Ability to navigate structures [1; 26; 27; 28; 35] • Critical, logical, analytical thinking, Conceptual skills [18; 28; 31; 33] • Ethical & Sustainable Thinking: assess the consequences and impact of ideas, opportunities and actions. [3; 18; 26; 29; 30; 31; 33; 35; 38] • Attitudes, behaviours, values and mindset necessary to take ethical decisions and act sustainably. Taking into consideration people's wellbeing and the ecosystem. [3; 18; 26; 29; 30; 31; 33; 35; 38]
Sensemaking	• Ability to accept/handle criticism / challenge biases [35] • Adaptability [28] • Perspective-Taking and Empathy [18; 19; 26; 27; 28; 29; 31; 33; 35; 38] • Problem Solving (general) [2; 14; 19; 27; 28; 35; 37] • Reflective Self-Awareness [3; 35]
Cooperation competence	• Ability to work independently and as part of a team, understanding multidisciplinary collaboration [2 ;3; 4; 14; 18; 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 37; 38] • Conflict and Dialogue Skills: Recognizing and appreciating diverse opinions and positions.[5; 18; 19; 29; 31; 35; 38]

	• Engaging in fair and constructive conflict resolution and maintaining cooperative relationships [5; 18; 19; 29; 31; 35; 38] • Enthusiastic but diplomatic and sensitive to peoples' needs [13; 23; 26; 27; 28; 38] • Good understanding of professional boundaries and the ability to identify when a conversation has reached these [3; 23; 27; 28] • Team-building, assertiveness and negotiation [5; 18; 19; 24; 26; 31; 38] • Teamwork & willingness to cooperate [4; 12; 14; 18; 26; 27; 28; 31; 33; 38] • Willing to listen to and understand a different viewpoint and able to respond to this with reasoned argument and fact [2; 18; 24; 25; 31; 37]
Communication competence	• Ability to make formal as well as informal, and verbal and non-verbal communication effectively [2; 5; 25; 26; 27; 28; 37] • Able to structure and manage conversations in a positive and constructive way [2; 14; 24; 25; 27; 28; 37; 38] • Analytical and able to construct and articulate reasoned arguments substantiated with fact [2; 3; 23; 28; 37] • Be persuasive and able to articulate sometimes complex issues simply and clearly [2; 23; 24; 28; 31; 37] • Good verbal communicator, able to get on well with people and to ask questions positively [14; 23; 27; 28; 31] • Lead discussion in an open and positive way that fosters learning, encourages debate [24; 25] • Literacy competence: the ability to understand and express thoughts, feelings and facts orally, in writing or in other forms, and to interact with others [2; 18; 24; 27; 28; 31; 37; 38] • Multilingual competence: the ability to use different languages for communication and to understand and express thoughts, feelings and facts orally or in writing [2; 12; 37] • Negotiation skills [3; 14; 27; 28; 31] • Presentation and Public Speaking skills [5; 14; 18; 31] • Understand, recognize and respect that each person has a unique perspective; Listening and providing emotional support; Adapting communication for developmental or age-appropriate conversations; Using appropriate supports to communicate effectively [3; 18; 24; 33; 38] • Communicating collaboratively [3; 18; 24; 33; 38]

Citizenship competence	• Active citizenship practices [2; 14; 16; 18; 19; 23; 30; 31; 33; 37; 38] • The ability to act as responsible citizens and to fully participate in civic and social life, based on understanding of social, economic, legal and political concepts as well as global developments and sustainability [2; 14; 16; 18; 19; 23; 24; 30; 31; 33; 37] • Constructive participation: in community activities, as well as in decision-making at all levels, from local and national to the European and international level [14; 16; 18; 19; 26; 30; 33; 38] • Democracy Concepts: Understanding democracy as a system of governance, a social structure, and a way of life. Knowing democratic values and participation processes, including civic engagement [18; 19; 23; 29; 30; 31; 33; 38] • Participation Skills and Willingness: Engaging actively in democratic decision-making and shaping processes in school and society. Recognizing and utilizing opportunities for social and political involvement [2; 14; 18; 19; 23; 24; 29; 31; 33; 37; 38] • Social Responsibility Awareness: Understanding one's responsibility towards others and acting in ways that benefit the community. Showing solidarity and taking responsibility for others beyond one's family and friends [2; 18; 19; 23; 24; 29; 30; 31; 33; 35; 37; 38]
Leadership	• Ability to delegate, monitor & control [5; 6; 7; 10; 23; 28; 31] • Conflict management [14; 18; 24; 27; 28; 29; 31] • Leadership Skills [4; 5; 10; 12; 17; 24; 26; 28; 31; 33] • The capacity to be change makers, to make a positive impact and to establish a strong support system among employees, volunteers, other stakeholders and communities, and to nurture new future community leaders. Leaders generate new ideas and concentrate team efforts in the right direction. Leaders influence people to behave in a certain way [12; 17; 23; 24; 26; 27; 28; 31; 33; 38] • Management Skills [6; 8; 11; 14; 15; 23; 24; 26; 27; 31; 38] • Strong interpersonal and people management skills [2; 6; 11; 23; 24; 28; 31; 37; 38] • Team Building and Motivation Skills [3; 12; 14; 17; 24; 26; 27; 28; 31]
Cultural/Intercultural competence	• Cultural awareness and expression competence: the understanding of how ideas are creatively expressed in different cultures, through different arts [2; 3; 12; 18; 19; 27; 28; 33; 35; 37; 38]

	• Cultural safety and humility: Supporting cultural practices, Recognizing and respecting the diversity of people and communities, Engaging in self-reflection [18; 23; 31; 35; 38] • Intercultural competence [2; 5; 12; 18; 19; 23; 27; 28; 33; 37; 38] • Intercultural dialogue [2; 12; 18; 19; 28; 31; 37; 38] • Perspective-Taking and Empathy: Understanding the thoughts, beliefs, and emotions of others, even from different backgrounds. Expressing compassion and sensitivity toward people facing social barriers [18; 19; 23; 26; 27; 28; 29; 33; 38] • Recognition of Diversity and Equality: Appreciating diversity and respecting people with different lifestyles and cultures. Believing in the equal value of all people and recognizing human dignity and rights [18; 19; 27; 29; 31; 33; 35; 38]

5.2 Student Civic Engagement: Activities & Roles

This section presents an overview of diverse forms of student engagement, translating these into concrete activities, roles, and practices. As a result of desk research analysis and systematic mapping, common roles and occupations typically associated with student civic engagement have been identified. These roles provide a foundation for developing the Reflection Guideline (chapter 11) and determining relevant engagement profiles, to ensure applicability and relevance in various civic contexts.

They provide guidance as to how the abstract concept of student civic engagement actually looks like in contexts of action: what roles can learners take in civic engagement contexts and which activities do they pursue in their respective engagement contexts? And how does this relate to the competences they can foster? For example, a student in a social volunteering setting (e.g. spending time with the elderly in a nursing home) will pursue different activities than one which is in a leadership position within a student organisation.

From the abundant database presented earlier, information on activities and roles has been extracted in the analysis sheet. To move from an abstract definition of student civic engagement to a more operational understanding, the analysis distinguishes three interrelated but analytically separate dimensions: (1) types of activities, (2) activity levels / spheres of impact, and (3) functional engagement roles. Together, these dimensions provide a structured view of how students engage, for whom, and in what capacity, This scheme is a proposal for further refinement, emerging from the generated data and aiming at making the different forms that (student) civic engagement can take more visible.

Dimension 1: Types of activities

The first dimension focuses on the *types of activities* in which students engage. Rather than describing impacts or competences, it captures the main modes of action observable across the collected

examples. On this basis, student civic engagement activities can be grouped into the following broad types:

- Community Engagement and Social Responsibility
- Student Representation and Governance
- Education, Mentoring, and Awareness Activities
- Event Planning and Fundraising
- Administrative and Organizational Activities
- Communication, Advocacy, and Public Relations
- Personal Development and Self-Reflection
- Leadership and Volunteer Management

These categories are not exhaustive, but they capture the dominant patterns across the material and make visible where activities such as social and community care or social entrepreneurship are situated within the broader landscape of student civic engagement.

Dimension 2: Activity levels / Spheres of impact

The second dimension refers to the *sphere of impact* in which activities are primarily located. While many activities have effects at multiple levels, they typically have a main focus in one of the following spheres:

- Individual Engagement and Personal Development
- Group Engagement and Leadership
- Institutional, Public and Policy Engagement

Dimension 3: Functional Engagement Roles

The third dimension concerns the functional roles within these activities. Across the evidence base, several recurring roles can be distinguished:

- Direct Student and Community Support (One-on-one or group engagement, mentoring, and advocacy): e.g.Supporting students with different needs (mentoring, advising, guiding)
- Representation, Advocacy, and Governance (Influencing change and shaping policies): e.g. Being present in multiple university committees (senate, social matters, faculty board, pedagogical board)
- Research, Knowledge, and Policy Preparation (Gathering data, preparing documents, and making informed decisions): eg. Reading and analyzing documents for committee and governance meetings
- Event Organization and Mobilization (Planning, managing, and executing activities): e.g. Mobilizing people for protests, awareness campaigns, and activism
- Communication, Public Relations, and Outreach (Sharing information and engaging with the public): e.g. Managing social media platforms for student engagement and activism
- Personal Growth, Learning, and Leadership Development: e.g. Self-training in debate, leadership, and civic engagement

Drawing on the clustered competences the next chapter presents the findings into a first version of the EngageComp framework that served as the starting point for subsequent empirical elaboration with students and experts.

6 Designing Framework Version 1

In the next step, the assigned competences were systematically reviewed. This review aimed to identify which categories from the NextSkills framework were represented by the competences and which categories were potentially lacking representation. Furthermore, competences that could not be clearly categorized within the existing structure of the NextSkills framework were separately analyzed. These uncategorizable competencies were specifically examined to highlight possible new competence domains not adequately reflected in the NextSkills competence model. On this basis and with a special focus on competences that could not be directly associated to the NextSkills Structure, a preliminary framework was drafted, highlighting the emerging competences from the literature analysis. Special attention was paid to emergent competences identified from the literature analysis, particularly Intercultural Competence and Leadership Competence along with Citizenship Competence, the latter deemed as central to student civic engagement.

Table 2: Framework Version 1

Framework Version 1, consisting of 20 competences			
organisation-related competences	**subject development-related competences**	**object-related competences**	**competences related to society**
• Cooperation competence • Communication competence • Self-determination • Sensemaking • Leadership	• Learning Literacy • Self-Efficacy • Self-competence • Reflective competence • Decision competence • Initiative and performance competence • Ambiguity competence • Ethical competence	• Design-thinking competence • Innovation competence • Digital literacy • Future and design competence • Systems competence	• Citizenship competence • (inter)cultural competence

Building on the conceptual groundwork and framework version 1 so far, the next step involved engaging directly with students and experts through sampled focus groups and interviews to examine and further refine the emerging competence framework. In the initial analysis, 20 competences were identified and assigned to four overarching domains, provisionally labelled “organisation related competences,” “subject development related competences,” “object related competences,” and “competences related to society. Feedback on the preliminary framework was solicited from

consortium partners in advance and subsequently discussed during the second Transnational Project Meeting.

7 Semi-Structured Expert Interviews and Focus Groups

The Consortium partners conducted either focus group or expert interviews, covering central thematic areas. Focus-Groups composed of 3–7 participants, were conducted online or face-to-face and lasted approximately 60–90 minutes. All discussions were recorded, transcribed using intelligent verbatim, anonymized, and translated. The resulting transcripts provided the foundation for the subsequent qualitative content analysis. This research step was essential to integrate the diverse perspectives of stakeholders and students, and enriching and validating the preliminary competence framework through real-world insights on student civic engagement and competence development.

Total: 17 Interviews (40 participants)

Expert Interviews:	8
Student Interviews:	1
Student Focus Groups:	5
Expert Focus Groups:	3

In total, 40 participants from nine European countries (Belgium, Spain, Germany, Malta, Croatia, Romania, France, Finland, and Slovenia) took part in the study, comprising 21 students and 19 experts. Across the interviews and focus groups, we engaged student leaders from university/local student councils, student associations and national student unions, together with university staff responsible for student engagement and inclusion (e.g., participation coaches, educational development and lifelong-learning coordinators), senior organisational roles (Policy and Project Officer, Director/Chief Executive Officer, Secretary General), and subject-matter experts such as university professors and external practitioners from service-learning and community-based research programmes, volunteering/youth outreach organisations, civic initiatives, and national student engagement programmes.

The transcripts underwent rigorous qualitative content analysis following Rädiker & Kuckartz's (2020) thematic-structuring approach as it provides a concise and strongly structured guideline for the focused analysis of the interviews and focus groups. The focused analysis of qualitative interviews refers to guideline-based interviews (e.g., problem-centered or expert interviews) and considers predefined thematic areas but remains open to emergent content.

The data was systematically analyzed through iterative processes of basic and fine coding and the adaptation of the coding scheme. The primary aims of the process were to integrate empirical evidence into previous desk-based research, triangulate data sources, incorporate the perspectives of students and experts, derive insights from authentic experiences, and deepen overall understanding of student civic engagement competences. First, the transcribed interviews were transferred to MAXQDA, organized, and explored to ensure data integrity and systematic documentation. Then, a precisely defined category system was developed and implemented in

MAXQDA, resulting in a structured, clearly delimited, and manageable coding frame. The following broad categories were established based on the semi-structured guiding questions from the guideline (for the detailed interview guideline, see *Annex II: Research Guideline & Moderation Plan for the qualitative Interviews & Validation*):

- **Definitions and Perceptions of Student Civic Engagement** (How participants understand and define civic engagement)
- **Motivations and Values** (Underlying motivations, personal drivers, and values tied to engagement)
- **Development of Competences / Future Skills** (Skills, competences and learning outcomes developed through engagement)
- **Framework Conditions** (Framework conditions that enable or hinder student civic engagement and reflection.
- **Reflection Guideline** (How can we support students in their competence reflection?)

These emergent codes were then collaboratively synthesized into a unified categorization schema, which was iteratively refined and applied across the full dataset. Throughout, the researchers kept a logbook and wrote detailed reflexive memos to document coding decisions, the introduction of novel categories, and the merging or exclusion of overlapping concepts.Detailed coding followed, refining the system with subcategories to capture specific aspects and emerging competences while maintaining structural clarity. Following this stage, a first outline of the revised framework was prepared and shared with the consortium. Inter-Rater reliability was ensured through the coding of two persons of the same interview, leading to a revision and reconsideration of the existing code system. This not only guaranteed that the Competence Framework faithfully represents the diversity of international perspectives on student civic engagement but also aligns with best practices for credibility and replicability in qualitative research. An updated Reflection Guideline was compiled, integrating previous work, input from the second TPM, and insights from the interview analysis. This version served as the basis for further development during the EngageAll project. The revised framework was circulated among consortium partners and relevant stakeholders for validation. In a synchronous discussion, feedback was collected to ensure accuracy, relevance, and completeness. This process concluded with the final version of the Competence Framework.

8 Qualitative Content Analysis and Validation

In the following, the results are presented and, where appropriate, the findings are illustrated with exemplary quotes from students and experts. The interviews indicate consistent strengthening of communication competences, including formal written communication, audience-appropriate argumentation, and goal-oriented coordination of tasks and roles (e.g., email etiquette, debate participation, and clarifying “who does what”). Organisational and project-management competences are repeatedly described, such as meeting planning, document preparation, logistics, fundraising, and scheduling under real constraints. One student highlighted how engagement shaped both organisation and adaptability: “To organize things: to be calmer, more patient, and realize realities differ. I don’t expect activities to go as I planned because situations vary. It has also helped me organize better and work in teams, knowing which role to take” (MU Student Focus Group 2). Collaboration competences (cooperation in teams, conflict resolution, mediation, and inclusive participation) appear across interviews and are linked to improved facilitation and delegation

practices: “talking to people about areas for development and criticism, delegating tasks correctly and leadership skills like that. That's not relevant for everyone, necessarily, but if you learn it on the job, mistakes happen and if you learn it with employees, then, well, the employees don't feel comfortable and that's bad” (DHBW Student Focus Group 1).

Public speaking emerges as a notable outcome, often connected to growing confidence and transfer to non-university settings: “At one conference in Finland, someone remarked on my confidence levels, attributing it to the skills I gained through volunteering. I’ve become better at engaging with others” (MCAST Expert Interview 2). Active listening is highlighted as a foundational communication element that supports dialogue across differing perspectives, including “the concept of active listening, who is able to listen, what is the need of the collective” (MU Student Focus Group 2). Time- and stress-management competences are reported, including prioritising commitments and maintaining procedural clarity in high-pressure situations. One student described this as “sacrific[ing] personal time for others. At first, I saw it as losing time, but later, I realized the impact was worth it” (MU Student Focus Group 2). Empathy and related interpersonal capacities (patience, humility, perspective-taking) are cited as frequently developed and operationalised through attentive listening and adaptation to diverse contexts: “empathy is crucial when working with diverse realities. You have to adapt, and adapting means having empathy” (MU Student Focus Group, I2).

Critical-reflective competences are visible as well: students and experts describe gains in critical thinking and “critical societal literacy” (understanding root causes, responsibilities), while noting that such outcomes require intentional scaffolding to occur reliably: “people should be aware of having a critical view, asking questions. This is again part of higher education, and probably citizenship competence as well to ask critically, ‘Why do we do that? What's going on?’” (EURASHE Expert Interview 4). Decision-making, initiative, leadership, and self-efficacy are identified as central to active participation, with calls to strengthen evidence-informed cooperation and community-awareness elements within competence descriptions. Self-efficacy emerges as an important part of student engagement, built through repeated experiences in communication, coordination, delegation, and logistics, with reported confidence gains and transfer beyond the immediate setting. Public speaking was also frequently mentioned as an illustrative case of such mastery-based progress and confidence building, alongside improved facilitation and inclusive team practices. Opportunities to plan activities, distribute responsibilities, and adapt to constraints create feedback loops that stabilise efficacy beliefs and make perceived capability more robust across contexts. Expert perspectives converge with these patterns, identifying self-efficacy, together with initiative, leadership, and decision-making as central to active participation, and recommending evidence-informed action and structured reflection to render gains systematic rather than incidental.

Overall, the material maps a coherent set of strengthened competences communication (written, verbal, audience-specific), collaboration and teamwork, organisation and project management, leadership and delegation, public speaking and active listening, time and stress management, empathy, critical thinking and societal literacy, and agency/self-efficacy—observed across diverse engagement contexts and reinforced by convergent interview evidence. Beyond specific competences, student civic engagement is perceived as a distinct learning space that extends beyond both academic coursework and company-based practice phases in study programmes. As one DHBW student explained, “You learn a lot of skills that you wouldn't otherwise acquire during your studies. So at the DHBW, well, we have the practical phases and you do similar things there, but within the structure of the company. And here I can now say: I do things that I couldn't do in the company for

another five or ten years, or I do things that I enjoy because I can't do them in the company at the moment or something like that, for example." (DHBW Student Focus Group I). This perception underlines the added value of engagement contexts for assuming responsibility earlier and in less constrained settings.

Based on the analysis of qualitative interviews and feedback from partners and stakeholders across institutions, the description of Civic and Democratic Competence was revised and clarified. The analysis of various competence frameworks and the qualitative data revealed civic competence as a particularly important dimension within student civic engagement, underscoring its unique potential as a learning context for Future Skills. However, civic competence cannot be conceptualized as a single competence; rather, it constitutes an overarching competence composed of multiple basic or cross-cutting competences into a cohesive whole, applicable capability to solve complex problems or act in real-world situations (Ehlers, 2020). These competences are more than the sum of their parts: they reflect the interplay and synthesis of foundational competences, tailored to complex tasks - such as civic engagement. Civic and Democratic Competence is defined here as an action competence that enables democratic participation. It encompasses the ability and readiness to engage actively, responsibly, and ethically in democratic and civic life through engagement in societal, practice-based, and individual contexts. This includes valuing democracy, human rights, cultural diversity, and equality, and combining participation skills with the motivation to contribute to democratic processes and social transformation. These findings were subsequently enriched by qualitative interview data and compared systematically with the Council of Europe Framework for Competences for Democratic Citizenship (Council of Europe, 2018). The Council of Europe framework was specifically chosen due to its strong conceptual alignment and its scientific grounding, effectively supporting the integration and validation of civic competence within our competence framework.

Structural adjustments were introduced to the preliminary framework based on the NextSkills structure, including a re-assignment of competences to refined domains and a renaming of those domains: "Subject development related" was reframed as Individual context: Personal Growth & Self-Development; "Object related competences" as Practice context: Application & Problem-Solving; and "Organisation related" as Societal context: Collaboration & Social Responsibility. The set of competences was mapped against the propositions emerging from interviews and prior mapping activities, and iteratively revised to ensure conceptual coherence and applicability. Competence descriptions were refined based on consortium input, stakeholder review, and thematic content analysis. Terms used by interviewees were retained where they already informed existing descriptions. Items judged to be values rather than competences were not added to the set and will be addressed separately (e.g., in the reflection guideline). Terminology was also adjusted to emphasise cross-cutting aspects such as responsibility and diversity, for example in the formulation Diversity & Intercultural Competence. Mentions of the terms *Equity, Diversity,* and Inclusion were treated primarily as value-related orientations and were integrated into Cooperation Competence (with an emphasis on equity and solidarity directed toward the common good) and into Intercultural and Diversity Competence, which now explicitly covers this thematic field. References to democratic participation were subsumed under Civic and Democratic Competence as an action competence enabling participation. The aspect of participation was added to the descriptions of Initiative and Performance Competence and of Cooperation Competence. The recurring theme of empathy and social responsibility was reflected through the inclusion of empathic communication and responsibility elements within the competence descriptions, particularly under Communication Competence. Finally, the notion of solidarity, frequently cited and recognised as politically charged, was

incorporated within Cooperation Competence, alongside a strengthened emphasis on participation in collective action.

The definition of Civic and Democratic Competence was revised and is no longer treated as a discrete competence located within a single domain. Instead, it is conceptualized as an integrative action competence that spans the framework and is constituted by the set of competence profiles described in the report. Within this framework, Civic and Democratic Competence constitutes the central overarching competence, emerging from and reinforced by the competences described herein. It is therefore not assigned to the individual, practice, or societal context, but is articulated through them. It functions as the goal state toward which the profiles collectively contribute: the readiness to engage responsibly and effectively in democratic life.

The results of this analysis were integrated into the first framework version, which was subsequently revised. The revised version was then circulated among consortium partners and relevant stakeholders. Consulting relevant stakeholders from several institutions ensured that the final published version of the competence framework underwent a thorough validation process to guarantee its optimal quality and suitability as a framework for student civic engagement.

9 Final Framework: EngageComp

The final **competence framework for student civic engagement** describes the competences that students develop through activities such as volunteering, service learning, and other forms of civic involvement. Engagement fosters the enhancement of a broad spectrum of competences across individual, practice-oriented, and societal domains, equipping students to address emerging societal challenges and complex demands in both personal and professional contexts and take action towards desirable futures.

Student civic engagement activities strengthen students' ability to take socially responsible action, contribute to positive social change, and participate actively in democratic society. It comprises three interconnected dimensions:

1. **Societal Context – Collaboration & Social Responsibility**

   As a domain of the competence framework, this area emphasizes civic engagement as a means to foster responsibility, collective action, and contributions to democratic and social progress.

2. **Practice Context – Application & Problem-Solving**

   Within the competence framework, this area highlights civic engagement as a means to translate ideas into practice, develop problem-solving capacities, and contribute to addressing societal challenges.

3. **Individual Context – Personal Growth & Self-Development**

   In the competence framework, this area underscores civic engagement as a driver of self-reflection, adaptability, and the development of competences for sustainable personal and professional futures.

In this framework, the 21 identified Competences are presented as Competence Profiles. A Competence Profile is a coherent field of capability that aggregates relevant competences to this field. It functions as a structured unit for design, reflection, and assessment. Reference Competences are the skills and competences situated within each profile. They specify the profile through granular, observable elements that express how the broader competence is demonstrated. Civic and Democratic Competence constitutes the central overarching competence, emerging from and reinforced by the competences described herein

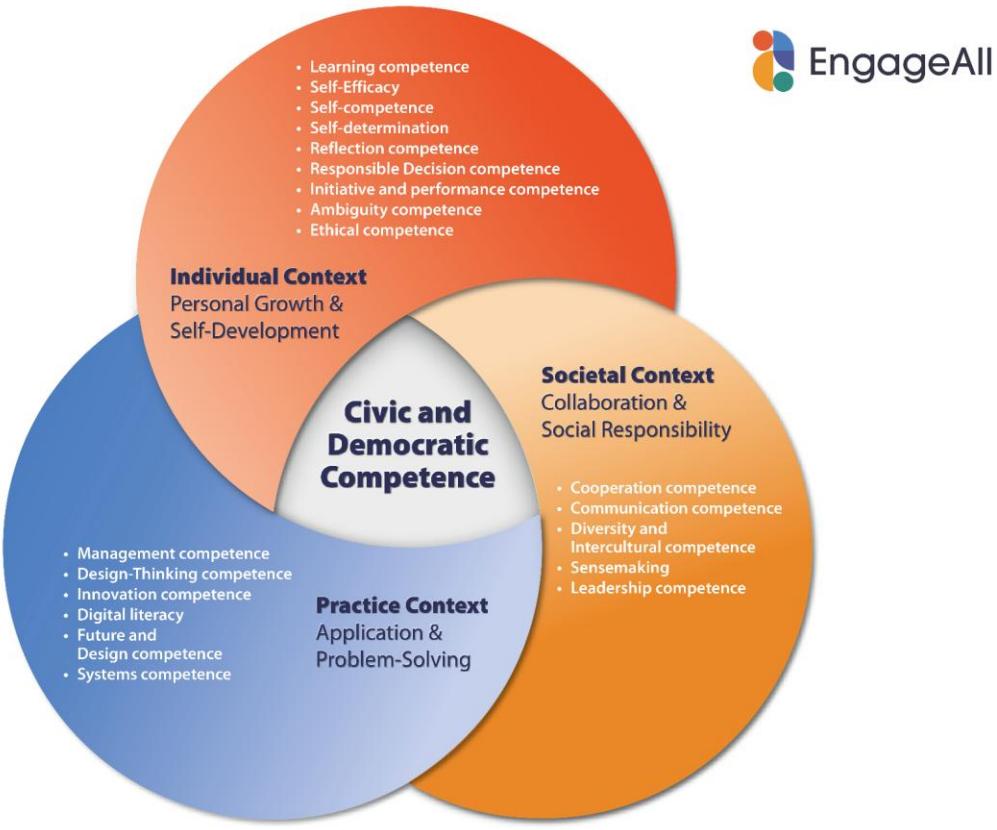

Figure 4: The EngageComp Framework

Detailed overview of Competences: Descriptions with Reference Competences

The following table presents the competence profiles in detail, with a detailed description for each competence profile and the corresponding reference competences. The competences are organised along three interconnected contexts: (1) Societal Context – Collaboration & Social Responsibility, (2) Practice Context – Application & Problem-Solving, and (3) Individual Context – Personal Growth & Self-Development.

Table 3: EngageComp: Reference Competences & Descriptions

Competence	Reference Competences	Description
Civic and Democratic Competence	-	**Civic and Democratic Competence** encompasses the ability and readiness to engage actively, responsibly, and ethically in democratic and civic life through engagement in societal, practice-based, and individual contexts. This includes valuing democracy, human rights, cultural diversity, and equality, and combining participation skills with the motivation to contribute to democratic processes and societal transformation.
Societal context: Collaboration & Social Responsibility		
Cooperation competence	teamworking ability, negotiation, conflict resolution, social intelligence, consulting expertise, ensuring equal participation, collective responsibility, collective commitment	Cooperation competence relates to the ability and disposition to cooperate and collaborate in teams, both face-to-face and digitally across organisations, with the purpose of transforming difference into commonalities. It includes acting in accordance with human rights, social justice, and solidarity, and showing the willingness to invest time and effort to promote collective well-being to the common good.
Communication competence	active listening, verbal and non-verbal communication, presentation skills, persuasion, negotiation, language proficiency, communication readiness, openness towards criticism, empathy, inclusive communication, public speaking	Communication competence entails not only language skills, but also empathic discourse, dialogue, and strategic communication aspects, which - taken together - serve the individual to communicate successfully and in accordance with the respective situation and context, in view and empathy of her/his own and others needs.

Diversity & Intercultural competence	cultural awareness and openness, diversity recognition, empathy, inclusivity awareness, bias recognition, perspective-taking	Diversity and intercultural competence refers to the ability and disposition to recognise, value, and engage constructively with human diversity across cultural, social, and linguistic contexts. It entails empathy, perspective-taking, awareness of cultural differences as well as the motivation to embrace intercultural experiences and to contribute to equitable and respectful relations in pluralistic professional and civic contexts.
Sensemaking	self-awareness, meaning creation, value orientation	Sensemaking comprises the willingness and ability to construct meaning and understanding from the rapidly changing structures within engagement, learning, work and life contexts, to further develop existing structures of meaning or to promote the creation of new ones where they have been lost.
Leadership competence	delegation, conflict management, team motivation, leader as a coach, inclusive leadership, crisis and stress management, ethical leadership	Leadership competence refers to the ability and disposition to guide individuals and groups toward shared goals in organisational and civic settings. It includes directing, coaching, and leading others, often in teams, by taking responsibility, while acting in ways that motivate and inspire colleagues to follow by example. Leadership competence also entails ethical orientation, inclusivity, empathy, and building trust to foster psychological safety, along with organisational and planning capacities to coordinate collective action. Ultimately, it involves modelling responsibility and integrity supporting others in their success and contributing to transformative change.
Practice context: Application & Problem-Solving		
Management competence	delegation competence, managing diverse perspectives, time management, project management, stakeholder communication, monitoring and	Management competence refers to the ability and disposition to structure and steer processes, people, and resources toward defined objectives in organisational and civic contexts.It entails clarity of goals and responsibilities, efficient time and self-management, and a structured, goal-oriented approach that aligns efforts across diverse actors. This competence also covers project and process

	evaluation, stress and risk management, assertiveness	management, logistics and resource allocation, documentation and reporting, and continuous monitoring to ensure effective and inclusive execution across diverse perspectives.
Design-Thinking competence	data evaluation, problem analysis, inclusive problem-solving, analytical thinking, flexibility and openness, versatility, ability to shift perspectives	Design-Thinking competence comprises the ability to use concrete methods to carry out creative development processes open-endedly with regard to given problems and topics and to involve all stakeholders in a joint problem and solution design process.
Innovation competence	creativity, innovation, problem-solving, willingness to experiment	Innovation competence includes the willingness to promote innovation - both technological and social - as an integral part of any organizational object, topic and process and the ability to contribute to the organization as an innovation ecosystem.
Digital literacy	media literacy, responsible digital use, digital self-reliance, digital awareness, information literacy, AI literacy, digital volunteering	Digital literacy is the ability and disposition to use digital media, to develop them in a productive and creative way, the capacity to critically reflect on its usage and the impact media have on society and work, both for private and professional contexts, as well as the understanding of the potentials and limits of digital media and their effects.
Future and Design competence	future readiness, foresight, futures literacy, willingness to change, ability to continuously improve, future mindset, readiness for development, initiating change	Future and design competence is the ability to envision, negotiate and communicate alternative, open futures and take steps of action toward them. It entails to embrace current and future situations with openness for the new, willingness to change and forward-thinking. To develop situations into other, new and previously unknown visions of the future and to approach these creatively.

Systems competence	sustainable thinking, systems thinking, structural navigation, identifying levers for impact, analytical competence, synergy creation, application competence, problem-solving, adaptability	Systems competence is the ability to recognise and understand complex personal, psychological, social and technical systems and their interrelations, and to design or support coordinated planning and implementation processes for new initiatives in the system. It also includes critical awareness of political, legal, cultural, environmental, and economic systems and their global interdependencies, using this understanding to assess power structures, inequality, and sustainability, and to engage in informed societal change.
Individual context: Personal Growth & Self-Development		
Learning competence	willingness to learn, self-reflection, self-directed learning, ability for life-long-learning, metacognitive skills	Learning competence is the ability and willingness to learn in a self-directed and self-initiated fashion. It entails metacognitive skills as well.
Self-Efficacy	self-confidence, goal orientation, professional conduct, identifying personal contribution, confidence in one's ability to make a difference, setting (personal) boundaries	Self-efficacy refers to the belief and one's self-confidence to plan, initiate, and complete civic tasks across contexts. It includes setting personal boundaries to sustain effort and well-being, and exhibiting professionalism. Self-efficacy encourages to take initiative and responsibility, much needed in student civic engagement, and can also be fostered through it by perceiving change and impact as a result of one's own engagement.
Self-competence	self-regulation, self-responsibility, self-organisation competence, self-management, cognitive load management	Self-competence is the ability to develop one's own personal and professional capabilities largely independently of external influences. This includes other skills such as independent self-motivation and planning, but also the ability to set goals, time management, organization, learning aptitude and success control through feedback. In addition, cognitive load management and a high degree of personal responsibility.

Self-determination	self-assertion, perseverance, endurance, autonomy	Self-determination describes an individual's ability to act productively within the field of tension between external structure and self -organisation, and to create room for self-development and autonomy, so that they can meet their own needs in freedom and self-organisation.
Reflection competence	self-awareness, openness to feedback, critical thinking, self-reflection	Reflection competence includes the willingness and ability to reflect, i.e. the ability to question oneself and others for the purpose of constructive further development, as well as to recognise underlying systems of behaviour, thought and values and to assess their consequences for actions and decisions holistically and critically.
Responsible Decision competence	decision-making, problem-solving, analytical thinking, participatory skills, responsibility-taking	Responsible Decision competence is the ability to seize decisions and to evaluate different alternatives against each other, as well as making a final decision and taking over the responsibility for it. It includes recognising others' needs, emotions, and lived experiences as part of the decision-making process, ensuring that decisions contribute to the well-being of individuals and communities.
Initiative and performance competence	taking Initiative, (intrinsic) motivation, self-motivation, resilience, goal-orientation, engagement, persistence, willingness for participation	Initiative and performance competence refers to an individual's ability to motivate him-/herself as well as to his/her wish of contributing to achievement. Persistence and goal-orientation form the motivational basis for performance. A positive self-concept also plays an important role as it serves to attribute success and failure in such a way that the performance motivation does not decrease.
Ambiguity competence	adaptability, flexibility, tolerance for uncertainty, resilience, dealing with uncertainty, ability to act in different roles, dealing with heterogeneity	Ambiguity competence refers to an individual's ability to recognise, understand, and finally productively handle ambiguity, heterogeneity, and uncertainty, as well as to act in different roles.
Ethical competence	ethical practice, sustainable thinking, tolerance	Ethical competence comprises the ability to perceive a situation as ethically relevant. This includes: its conceptual, empirical and contextual

		consideration (perceive), the ability to formulate relevant prescriptive premises together with the evaluation of their relevance, their weight, their justification, their binding nature and their conditions of application (evaluate) and the ability to form judgements and check their logical consistency, their conditions of use and their alternatives (judge).

This framework will aid in identifying the range of competences and skills, such as effective communication, leadership, ethical competence, active citizenship, associated with student civic engagement and volunteering. By aligning the framework with the ESCO database, the competences acquired through these activities will become more visible and transferable across the European Union and beyond.

10 ESCO-Mapping

The European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations (ESCO) framework provides a standardised multilingual classification system that links education, training and the labour market across Europe (European Commission, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, 2025). ESCO's hierarchical structure organizes competences, skills, and knowledge into four main pillars: Transversal Skills and Competences (T), Sector-Specific Skills (S), Knowledge (K), and Language Skills and Knowledge (L).

The alignment with the EngageComp Framework will enhance the attractiveness of volunteering to students by enabling them to effectively communicate the competences they have gained to potential employers. The alignment process required a systematic cross-referencing methodology designed to identify correspondences between the 21 competences from the EngageComp framework and the existing ESCO entries in the database, while also recognizing gaps requiring new proposals. For each EngageAll competence, researchers identified the most relevant ESCO skills and competences based on definitional overlap and conceptual similarity. The alignment encompasses 116 distinct ESCO skill mappings across the EngageComp framework, with most mappings concentrated in ESCO's sector-specific skills (S) and self-management (T3) categories (see Fig. 5: Number of skills mapped to each competence by type). EngageAll competences encompasses integrative constructs that synthesize multiple levels of abilities, while ESCO skills typically address more specific, targeted and measurable abilities making one-to-one correspondences relatively rare.

The coverage analysis (see *Annex III: Detailed Competence-by-Competence ESCO Analysis*) reveals that 18 out of 21 EngageAll competences have at least moderate alignment with existing ESCO entries, while three competences from the EngageComp Framework (Design-thinking competence, Self-determination, Innovation competence) have weak alignment or only moderate single matches. The Quality of Alignment shows both the compatibility of the EngageComp framework with ESCO and important areas of differences that feed potential ESCO additions. Based on the results, we propose new ESCO entries that require inclusion in the ESCO database.

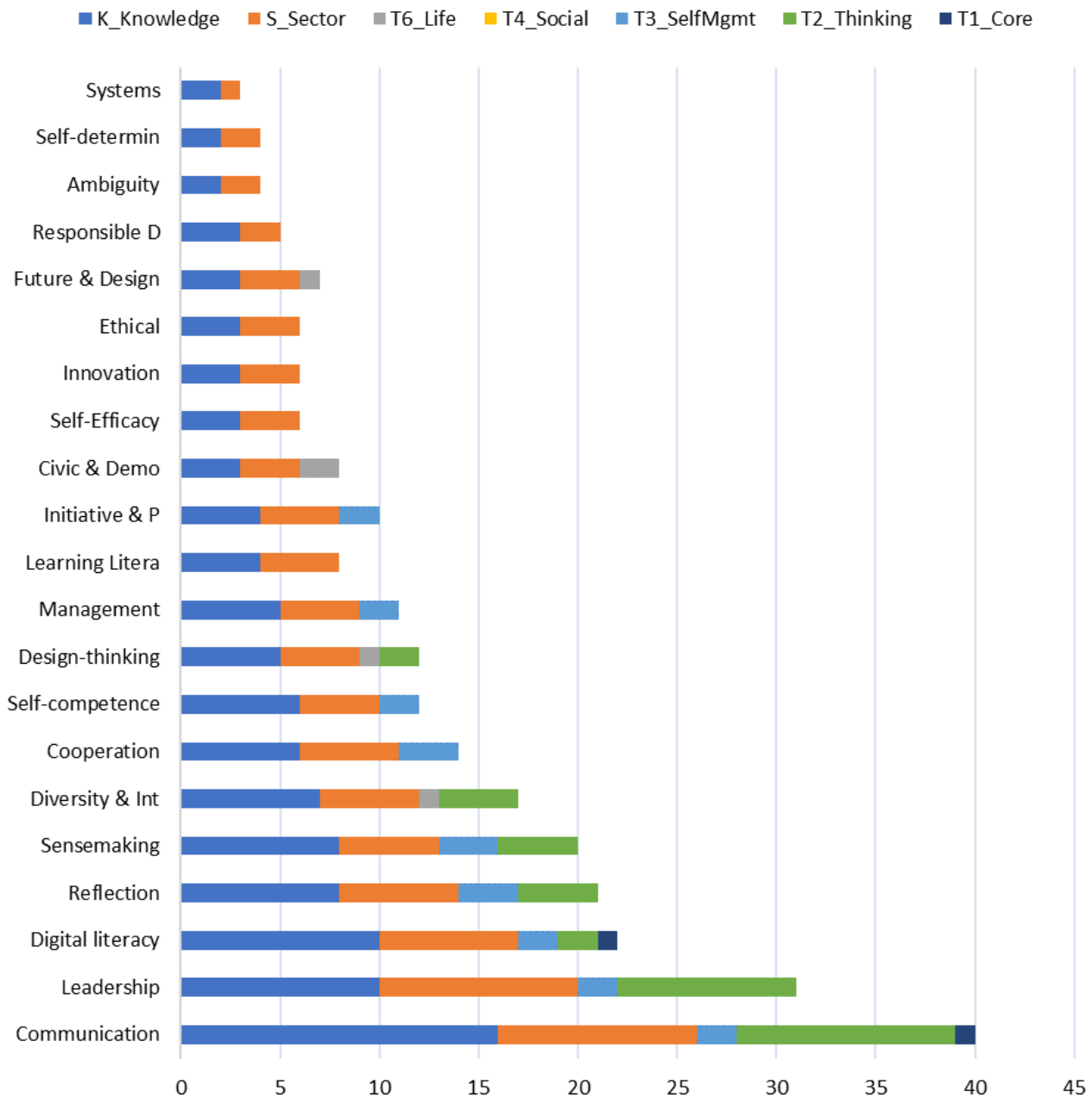

Figure 5: Number of skills mapped to each competence by type

The findings in general indicate that EngageAll competences generally represent broader, more integrated constructs than individual ESCO skills, requiring multiple ESCO entries to capture their full scope and complexity. For a detailed, complete analysis of the ESCO alignment, see the full report on the EngageAll Website (https://engageall.eu/).

11 A Reflection Guideline for Student Civic Engagement

Given the heterogeneity of student roles and volunteering activities, a definitive one-to-one linkage between occupational or engagement profiles and the competences defined in the framework is not

practicable. To ensure systematic attribution across diverse practices, a Reflection Guideline is proposed that provides a structured, reflective-based process where students reflect on, assess, and document the competences gained through civic engagement, mapping them to the competence profiles and reference competences. The guideline is presented here as a first version and will be iteratively refined in subsequent project phases based on stakeholder feedback.

In practice, learners document activities and evidence, reflect on tasks and outcomes, and map these to the framework's competence profiles and reference competences. This approach ensures comprehensive coverage of varied engagement profiles while preserving conceptual coherence and allowing for context-sensitive attribution to the identified competences. We propose the following steps:

Step 1: MyEngagement Profile

Students are supported in documenting their engagement biography. They document where and in what form they have already been involved with civic engagement, what their motivations and reasons are for getting engaged and what achievements and learnings they can build upon. Moreover, they can already determine specific (Future Skills) strengths.

Step 2: Current engagement

Students are encouraged to reflect on their current engagement with an engagement matrix and several guiding questions and model personas: what roles are they currently taking in what domain, which activities are they doing? What are their goals in their civic engagement? Students reflect upon personal experiences by identifying situations where they successfully applied competences ("possess"), faced challenges due to lacking competences ("lack"), and recognizing competences they aspire to gain ("wishes"). Students document their reflections digitally to track competence evolution over time and anchor later assessment in actual evidence.

Step 3: Using the Competence Framework

In this step, students get to know the EngageComp framework and are guided in discovering the different competence profiles. They can then reflect on their current Future Skills development with a digitally supported self- and peer-assessment on the different skills profiles. Based on documented activities and experiences, students perform a structured self-assessment, aligning their documented contexts and own reflections to the predefined competence framework. This self-assessment makes competences as well as strengths and gaps explicit and tangible.

Step 4: Documentation of Engagement Experiences

Students are now encouraged to document - in written form, but also (audio)visually - relevant engagement experiences, e.g. specific successes, positive or challenging situations. They are asked to document them according to the STAR-method (Situation, Task, Action, Result) and to also reflect on their emotions and learnings.

Step 5: Reflection and further development

Students are now supported in reflecting which of the competences of the EngageComp framework they have fostered and/or needed or even lacked in the described situations. They are encouraged

to also provide and gather peer feedback to enrich their understanding of their personal competence development. They are guided on making their progress and learnings visible and to plan their future competence development. Furthermore they formulate short-term and long-term personal development plans, identifying steps and strategies to attain desired competences in practice opportunities. Ideally, these reflections, evidence, documentations or milestones are integrated into a digital badge platform, providing students with formal validation and visible recognition of their civic learning journey.

These steps are ideally supported by a toolbox with supporting materials and additional resources.

12 Conclusion

This report presents a validated competence framework for student civic engagement, developed through a systematic literature review, cross-analysis of existing frameworks, and qualitative interviews and focus groups across different European contexts. The framework organises 21 competences within three domains - Individual context: Personal Growth & Self-Development; Practice context: Application & Problem-Solving; Societal context: Collaboration & Social Responsibility - and defines Civic and Democratic Competence as an overarching outcome evidenced across domains; a concise Reflection Guideline is proposed to translate the framework into practice through structured identification, documentation, self-assessment, and planning.

In the next steps the project moves from framework development to piloting and institutional embedding. Student-led engagement scenarios, principally a student ambassador scheme and study program integrated activities, will be co-designed and trialled with partner institutions, community organisations and across varied engagement settings, using the Reflection Guideline to structure documentation and feedback. Practical implementation resources (concise guidance materials, exemplar evidence, monitoring templates, and training materials) will be finalised and made available via an online toolkit for programme- and institution-level use. Peer-learning, outreach, and policy-oriented dissemination will be organised to support context-sensitive adoption across the partnership and inform recommendations to foster student civic engagement at programme and institutional levels.

For higher education providers, policy makers, and civic partners, the report offers a coherent and usable architecture for designing, supporting, and recognising student civic engagement. It provides a shared reference for strategy development, quality enhancement, and evidence-based decision-making across institutions and stakeholder networks.

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Acknowledgements & Contact Information

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Disclaimer

This report reflects the authors' views only. The European Commission is not responsible for any use that may be made of the information it contains.

Appendix

Annex I: Overview Frameworks Desk Research

Title	Year	Author/ Institution	Country	Link
SLIDE project: Service-Learning & Digital Empowerment [1]	2024	Kaat Somers / UCSIA	Belgium	https://www.servicelearningvlaanderen.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PR1Reflectie_NED.pdf
Youthpass and the revised key competences [2]	n.d.	SALTO Training and Cooperation Resource Centre	EU	https://www.youthpass.eu/en/help/faqs/keycompetences/
Palliative Competency Framework - Hospice Volunteers [3]	2021	BC Centre for Palliative Care	Canada	https://www.bc-cpc.ca/echo-project-new-home/echo-project-past-series-and-resources/hospice-volunteer-competency-framework/competency-framework-document/
Youth Voluntary Service – Local Guidelines [4]	2024	Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector	Malta	https://maltacvs.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/YVS-Local-Guidelines-Jan-25.pdf
The Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST) and the Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS) Collaborative Agreement on the Set-Up of a Volunteer Hub at MCAST [5]	2024	Malta College of Arts, Science, and Technology (MCAST) and The Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector (MCVS)	Malta	https://mcast.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/MCASTlink69.pdf
Youth-Volunteer-Journal [6]	2022	Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector	Malta	https://maltacvs.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Youth-Volunteer-Journal.pdf
University Student Societies Regulations, Education Act (Cap. 327) [7]	2019	Ministry for Education and Employment (MEDE)	Malta	https://www.um.edu.mt/media/um/docs/about/governance/regulations/general/UniversityStudentSocietiesRegulations.pdf
Student Societies at JC: Code of Practice [8]	2024	University of Malta:G.F.Abela Junior College	Malta	https://www.um.edu.mt/jc/journey/admissionsadvice/proceduresduties/codeofpracticeforstudentsocietiesatjc
Student and Staff Election Procedure [9]	2024	Deputy Principal VPET: Malta College of Arts, Science and Technology (MCAST)	Malta	https://mcast.edu.mt/wp-content/uploads/DOC_275_CORP_REV_C_STUDENT-AND-STAFF-ELECTIONS-PROCEDURE-2.pdf

Scout Association Malta [10]	2014	The Scout Association of Malta	Malta	https://scouts.mt/wp-content/uploads/SK_Downloads/The_Association/POR/Chapters/02_Key_Policies_v1.1.pdf
Chapter 363: Local Government Act [11]	2023	Government of Malta	Malta	https://www.um.edu.mt/__data/assets/pdf_file/0004/180562/council-act.pdf
National Programme for Youth Volunteering: Youth Voluntary Work Scheme [12]	2021	Malta Council for the Voluntary Sector	Malta	https://maltacvs.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Youth-Voluntary-Work-Scheme-Guidelines-16.07.2021.pdf
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Study of Volunteering in the European Union: Country Report Malta [14]	2010	GHK / Council of Europe	Malta	https://pjp-eu.coe.int/documents/42128013/47261764/National_report_MT.pdf/60e33ddf-cd62-4ade-9c09-d057e183a617?t=1377603786000
Guidelines for Volunteers [15]	2023	Government of Malta: Ministry for Inclusion, Social Inclusion and Voluntary Organisations	Malta	https://volunteers.mt/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Volunteera-Malta-Guidelines-for-Volunteers-2023.pdf
Community Engagement in Higher Education: Trends, Practices and Policies – Analytical Report [16]	2020	Thomas Farnell / European Commission - DG EAC PPMI	EU	https://unic.eu/storage/app/media/toolkits/unic4er/community-engagement-in-higher-education-nc0319881enn-1.pdf
The Bloomsbury Handbook of Student Politics and Representation in Higher Education [17]	2024	Manja Klemencic / Bloomsbury Academic	EU	https://library.oapen.org/viewer/web/viewer.html?file=/bitstream/handle/20.500.12657/87502/9781350375987.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y
Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture - Guidance document for vocational education and training [18]	2024	Education Department of the Council of Europe / Council of Europe	EU	https://rm.coe.int/prems-056824-rfcdc-guidance-doc-for-vet/1680b1c6f4
Erasmus+ Programme Guide [19]	2024	European Commission	EU	https://erasmus-plus.ec.europa.eu/sites/default/files/2024-11/erasmus-programme-guide-2025_en.pdf

Student Participation – Innovative Practice Guide [20]	2021	European Students' Union	EU	http://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/GUIA-STUPS_v03.pdf
Bologna With Students' Eyes 2024 [21]	2024	Horia Onita, Iris Kimizoglu, Tanguy Guibert (European Students' Union)	EU	https://esu-online.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/ESU-BWSE-2024-1.pdf
Developing the future careers of students' association education officers [22]	2024	sparqs	UK	https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/ch/Education%20officer%20outduction%20toolkit%202024-25.pdf
Professional standards framework for student engagement [23]	2022	sparqs	UK	https://www.sparqs.ac.uk/upfiles/Professional%20standards%20framework%20for%20student%20engagement.pdf
Example Volunteer Job Descriptions - Roles, Skills & Experience [24]		Ian McLintock	UK	https://www.charityexcellence.co.uk/volunteer-job-description-template/
Student Representative Role Profile [25]		Herts Student Union	UK	https://hertssu.com/pageassets/your-say/student-reps/Student-Representative-Role-Profile.pdf
Competency Framework for Volunteers [26]	2020	DYVO Consortium/Warehouse Hub	Europe	https://dyvo.eu/wp-content/uploads/DYVO-Competency-Framework_EN.pdf
Kompetenzbilanz aus Freiwilligen-Engagement für „Freiwillige in Parks" [27]	2012	Nationale Naturlandschaften, Europarc Deutschland, Akademie für Ehrenamtlichkeit Deutschland, European Union	Germany	http://www.ehrensache-natur.de/files/2012/10/Anleitung-Kompetenzbilanz.pdf
Infos und Materialien zur Kompetenzbilanz aus Freiwilligen-Engagement [28]	2006	Deutsches Jugendinstitut	Germany	https://www.dji.de/fileadmin/user_upload/5_kompetenznachweis/KB_Infos_281206.pdf
Demokratiekompetenz bei Service-Learning Modellentwicklung und Anregungen für die Praxis [29]	2019	Anna Mauz, Markus Gloe, Stiftung Lernen durch Engagement, LMU	Germany	https://www.servicelearningvlaanderen.be/wp-content/uploads/2024/10/PR1Reflectie_NED.pdf
Assessment Framework for Civic Competency and Engagement [30]	2015	Judith Torney-Purta, Julio C. Cabrera, Katrina Crotts Roohr, Ou Lydia Liu, & JosephA.Rios	USA	https://www.researchgate.net/publication/282790307_Assessing_Civic_Competency_and_Engagement_in_Higher_Education_Research_Background_Frameworks_and_Directions_for_Next-Generation_Assessment

Core competencies in civic engagement - A Working Paper in the Center for Engaged Democracy's Policy Papers Series [31]	2012	Leila Brammer, Gustavus Adolphus College Rebecca Dumlao, East Carolina University Audrey Falk, Merrimack College Elizabeth Hollander, Tufts University Ellen Knutson, Northwestern University Jeremy Poehnert, Massachusetts Campus Compact Andrea Politano, Merrimack College Valerie Werner, University of Illinois at Chicago	USA	https://www.bc-cpc.ca/echo-project-new-home/echo-project-past-series-and-resources/hospice-volunteer-competency-framework/competency-framework-document/
Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture [32]	2016	Council of Europe	EU	https://rm.coe.int/prems-004721-the-reference-framework-of-competences-for-democratic-cul/1680a27f24
Council Recommendation on Key Competences for Lifelong Learning [33]	2019	Council of Europe	EU	https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/297a33c8-a1f3-11e9-9d01-01aa75ed71a1/language-en
Global Citizenship Education [34]	2019	Swiss Commission for UNESCO	EU	https://www.unesco.ch/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/GCED_A5_EN.pdf
Engaged Learning in Belgium [35]	2022	Courtney Marsh & Noël Klima	Belgium	https://biblio.ugent.be/publication/8751309
Moving Neighbours [36]	2019	UCLL	Belgium	https://www.movingneighbours.be/en-gb
Service-Learning, European Citizenship Competence and the Common Good [37]	2023	Kris Grimonprez	Belgium	https://kuleuven.limo.libis.be/discovery/fulldisplay?docid=lirias4138231&context=SearchWebhook&vid=32KUL_KUL:Lirias&lang=en&search_scope=lirias_profile&adaptor=SearchWebhook&tab=LIRIAS&query=any,contains,LIRIAS4138231&offset=0

The Relationships Between Service-Learning, Social Justice, Multicultural Competence, and Civic Engagement [38]	2008	Aaron Einfeld & Denise Collins	EU	https://www.bc.edu/content/dam/files/centers/boisi/pdf/s091/einfeld.pdf

Annex II: Research Guideline & Moderation Plan for the qualitative Interviews

The Moderation Plan covers the main topics of discussion and some guiding questions.

Topic/agenda point	Goals	Questions Students	Questions Experts
Introduction	- information of all participants - managing expectations	- Introduce yourself and the institution you represent - Present the project, clearly defining: ● The problem; ● The aim of EngageAll ● The goal of this discussion - data protection: the discussion is recorded, transcribed and anonymised. The analysis will be done by the coordinator with the anonymised, translated transcripts. In the final report, there will be no possibility to identify the participants. - The role of the moderator entails that there is no intervention, only if participants of the Focus Group start deviating from the topic. The idea is that participants speak freely, and the moderator occasionally introduces another question. Remember, there are no right or wrong answers, and the idea is that all participants feel encouraged to express their views and opinions). - The moderator must consider the following: (i) create a pleasant atmosphere for debate; (ii) keep participants engaged in the discussion and to the point; (iii) clarify any issues only if necessary; (iv) motivate participants to continue with their thoughts/ideas.	
Icebreaking Impulse	- getting to know participants - participants getting to know each other	- Shortly introduce yourself. - Three words: what have you learnt from (student) civic engagement?	
Introducing student civic engagement	- discussing the forms and relevance of student civic engagement - awareness for student civic engagement	- Which extracurricular activities such as volunteering, being in a student club, etc. do you follow? - Can you describe the activities there? - What is your role in this? - Why do you follow these activities? What is your motivation? Why does it matter to you? Which positive aspects can you find there?	- What do you understand as “student civic engagement”? - Why does it matter? - Which forms and activities of student engagement do students you know follow? And why, what is their motivation? - What potentials are there - and which barriers do they face? - What is your role/what does your work have to do with this?

Competence and framework discussion	- discussing relevant competences - validation of preliminary framework	- What have you learnt from your engagement activities? - What competencies have you developed? Can you describe a concrete situation? - Are there any skills or competencies you feel are important in your engagement context and you would like to further develop? Can you describe a specific challenging situation you have experienced to back this up?	*Shortly explain Future Skills: competencies to successfully act in emergent contexts of action, to act in times of change* - What are the most important competencies or Future Skills that can be learnt through student civic engagement? *Show the preliminary framework* - Please discuss our preliminary framework. What can you confirm, what is missing from your point of view? What would you change, adapt, …? - Would this be a helpful tool for you and your work, and if yes/no, why (not)?
Support for competence reflection	- gathering input for a reflection guideline	- Imagine you are asked to create a competence profile, with a specific focus on the competencies developed in your student civic engagement. How would you proceed? - What kind of support would you need? - What tools or resources would help you in reflecting on your competencies?	- We are designing a student reflection guideline to support students in reflecting their competence or Future Skills development in student civic engagement. From your point of view, what would you include? How would you proceed? - Do you know any good practices and useful resources?
Outlook: Framework conditions and vision for student civic engagement	- collect information on framework conditions that can be relevant for next steps of the initiative - design a vision	- What makes it easier, more fun, more interesting, more pleasant to follow your engagement? - What makes it more difficult or less pleasant? - What could be improved at your institution to make it easier for you to get involved? - What would the perfect way of student civic engagement look like for you?	- Thinking about framework conditions: which aspects are favorable to student civic engagement? - And what is less favorable and makes it more difficult or improbable for students to follow student civic engagement? - What could be improved at your institution to make it easier for you to get involved? - What is your positive vision for student civic engagement?

Wrap-Up	- ending the meeting - giving an outlook for further involvement	- give a short summary of discussions - inform about the next steps of the results and how the results will be contribute to the initiative - encourage to participate in further project activities, e.g. Student Advisory Groups, Webinars, etc. Highlight what they gain from participating. - inform participants that they will receive the report on this research - make participants sign the Consent forms

Annex III: Detailed Competence-by-Competence ESCO Analysis

For each EngageAll competence, researchers identified the most relevant ESCO skills and competences based on definitional overlap and conceptual similarity by mapping EngageComp with the ESCO Database. The *Quality of Alignment* shows both the compatibility of the EngageComp framework with ESCO and important areas of differences that feed potential ESCO additions.

EngageAll Competence	Closest ESCO matches	Quality of alignment
Civic & Democratic competence	Participate actively in civic life, apply knowledge of social sciences, demonstrate commitment to democracy	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Cooperation competence	Work in teams, negotiate compromises, teamwork principles, build networks, cooperate with colleagues	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Communication competence	Demonstrate intercultural competence, communicate in outdoor/virtual settings, show empathy	Strong and complex alignment Strong individual matches
Diversity & Intercultural competence	Show empathy, appreciate diverse cultures, demonstrate intercultural competence, respect diversity	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Sensemaking	Cope with uncertainty, cope with stress, think abstractly/holistically, synthesise information	Moderate alignment Only moderate single matches
Leadership competence	Lead a team, leadership principles, lead others (strongest single match), assume responsibility, show empathy	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Management competence	Perform project management, manage processes/resources/team/time	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Design-thinking competence	Design thinking, think creatively, apply systemic design, solve problems	Weak alignment Moderate single matches **Will be proposed as a new separate**

		competence to be included in the ESCO database.
Innovation competence	Think innovatively, solve problems, seek innovation	The weakest alignment Only moderate single matches **Will be proposed as a new separate competence to be included in the ESCO database.**
Digital literacy	Media and information literacy, use ICT systems, have computer literacy, create digital content	Strong alignment Strong individual matches
Future and Design competence	Cope with uncertainty, think holistically, anticipate change	Moderate alignment Only moderate single matches
Systems competence	Think holistically, solve problems	Moderate alignment Weak single matches
Learning Literacy	Demonstrate willingness to learn, adapt to change, develop new ideas define learning objectives, apply self-control	Highest overall alignment Strong single matches
Self-Efficacy	Show confidence, show determination, manage personal progression	Strong alignment Strong single matches
Self-competence	Manage personal professional development, exercise self-reflection, manage personal progression, plan,analyse own performance	Strong and robust alignment Strong single matches
Self-determination	Show determination, exercise self-reflection	Weak alignment Only weak single matches

		Will be proposed as a new separate competence to be included in the ESCO database.
Reflection competence	Exercise self-reflection, think holistically, assess others feelings, demonstrate willingness to learn	Strong alignment Strong single matches
Responsible Decision competence	Make decisions, assume responsibility, think holistically	Strong alignment Strong single matches
Initiative and performance competence	Show initiative, work independently, show confidence	Moderate alignment Only moderate single matches
Ambiguity competence	Cope with uncertainty, cope with stress	Moderate alignment Only moderate single matches
Ethical competence	Think critically, ethics, morality	Moderate alignment Only moderate single matches