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# 2017

## **Sozial**almanach

Schwéierpunkt: **Lëtzebuerg 2060 –  
1,1 Mio Awunner?**

L'annuaire Caritas sur la  
situation sociale du Luxembourg



Seit 1932 hat sich Caritas durch ihre Mitarbeit in nationalen Gremien und durch die Schaffung von sozialen Diensten für sozial benachteiligte Menschen eingesetzt. Das Aufzeigen innovativer Wege zur Stärkung des gesellschaftlichen Zusammenhalts ist Caritas ein wichtiges Anliegen. Als Mitgestalter des sozialen Lebens in Luxemburg sucht Caritas den Dialog mit den verantwortlichen Politikern, der Zivilgesellschaft und der Wirtschaft.

## **Sozial**almanach 2017

Herausgeber:

Nathalie Georges, Danielle Schronen und  
Robert Urbé

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*Sous la direction de Nathalie Georges, Danielle Schronen et Robert Urbé*

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# VOCIS – Vocational training of the inner self: Resources to grow in an increasingly stressful environment

ZVJEZDAN PENEZIĆ, STEPHAN RIETMANN & DANIELLE SCHRONEN

## VOCIS – a European project

Coaching is used by people mostly when problems of external or internal cooperation occur.<sup>1</sup> The loss of cooperation skills or possibilities, conflicts in confidential personal relationships or problems with superiors and colleagues at the workplace are examples of external cooperation problems. Internal cooperation problems refer to the way a person is dealing with him- or herself. Self-regulation is therefore a central dimension in coaching processes. To set clear goals, to keep up with efforts or to deal with frustration, difficult emotions and problems require a successful cooperation with oneself. Functions of self-regulation are basic and integrative life competences which are an essential prerequisite for satisfactory relationships and success in school and working life. Effective counselling, coaching and therapy support and develop conditions that allow clients to master their concerns, problems and developmental tasks by themselves. Thus, coaching fundamentally contributes to the improvement of self-regulation.

Within the framework of the Erasmus+ project VOCIS, it is intended to identify which specific functions are meant when talking about self-regulation, how to evaluate them in a self-assessment and how to develop these functions with self-instruction, exercises, training and at the workplace. VOCIS (Vocational Training of the Inner Self) works with scientific methods and standards to develop practical solutions. VOCIS ([www.vocis.org](http://www.vocis.org)) represents a consortium of five partners for the 2016 to 2018 term:

- Antares – Società per lo Sviluppo dei Sistemi Organizzativi (Rome, Italy),
- Ballymun Job Centre Co-operative society limited (Dublin, Ireland),
- Caritasverband für das Dekanat Borken e.V. (Borken, Germany),
- University of Zadar (Zadar, Croatia),
- Fondation Caritas Luxembourg (Luxembourg, Luxembourg).

<sup>1</sup> Gilligan (2008).

## Motive, background and objectives of the project

The working world in Western societies has undergone an intensive structural change, which is mainly determined by developments such as globalisation and digitization and the resulting flexibilisation of working and economic life. The effect on people, teams and organisations is massive, in particular acceleration and changes in the time structures<sup>2</sup> have an increasing impact. The problematic consequences include the increase of overburden, mental stress, burnout and depression. In general, burnout can be understood as a dysbalance between mental exertion due to high responsibility, labour intensity, time pressure and contradictory requirements on the one hand and recognition on the other. Thus, the problem is not primarily excessive work, but a question of circumstances under which this work is executed. Work stress due to gratification crises is reported in Germany for 9,3% of the employees<sup>3</sup>, so that about every tenth employee makes this experience every day. This results in high individual, social, organisational and societal health-care costs.

For years, a persistently high number of cases of incapacity for work due to mental disorders have been observed in the health and social services, but the figures are particularly low for banks and insurance companies<sup>4</sup>. As typical sources of stress are named multitasking, high deadline and performance pressure, monotony, disturbances and interruptions, very fast working tempo and recurring confrontation with new tasks. Front places of the load scale are occupied by time and performance pressure (40%), long working hours and commuting distances (35%), followed only then by physical constraints like noise, heat, etc.<sup>5</sup>

When looking at the results of the survey by *Bundesanstalt für Arbeitsschutz und Arbeitsmedizin (BAUA)*<sup>6</sup>, it is remarkable that the significant increases of the stress levels observed between the late 1990s and the mid-2000s can no longer be recorded. Rather, the stress values appear stable on the relatively high level of the 2000s. Yet, the survey shows that the indicators have slightly worsened in comparison to 2005/2006 for the longer-term stress sequences among the employees. BAUA considers as confirmed its assumption that the importance of psychological stress for the shaping of a humane work environment has increased.

The outlook for the future of the world of work and life as well as the projected changes let expect a further dynamisation. Complexity, unpredictability and ambiguity of different spheres of life are clearly increasing. In this context fits the survey of the German

2 Rosa (2012).

3 DAK (2012).

4 Ibidem.

5 Kroll, Mütters & Dragano (2011).

6 BAUA (2012), p. 9-10.

federation of trade unions<sup>7</sup> pointing out, in its index “Gute Arbeit” (good work), the fact that 36% of all employees do not believe that they can hold their jobs up to the age of retirement – with an increasingly negative incidence. The impairment in the working atmosphere holds a leading position among stress factors that have the greatest impact on health.<sup>8</sup> But work-related impairment and mental stress are also reported by 12% of all professional staff. Academics take here a top position (17,6%), which they share with managerial and executive staff (16,9%) as reported by the German Federal Statistical Office.<sup>9</sup> The experience of increasing compaction and intensification of work is a wide-ranging, broad phenomenon reported by 63% of all employees. Depending on the source, 40% or 52% report permanent time pressure and agitation.<sup>10</sup> On the European level, the 6th European Working Conditions Survey pictures intensive work as quite prevalent in Europe: *37% of workers in the EU report working to tight deadlines while 34% report working at high speed ‘around three-quarters of the time’.*<sup>11</sup>

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has dedicated the World Day for Safety and Health at Work in 2016 to the issue of workplace stress and reports that not only psychological problems but also other major categories of diseases like cardiovascular problems or musculoskeletal disorders may be connected to work-related stress. ILO reports other findings from European studies<sup>12</sup>:

- *The 4th European Working Conditions Survey (2007) revealed that an estimated 40 million people in the EU were affected by work-related stress.*
- *According to the European Risk Observatory Report published in 2009, work-related stress represented in Europe between fifty and sixty per cent of all lost working days.*

In Luxembourg, one third of the workforce complains about symptoms of stress in 2016 – by 2015, this proportion was only 30%. One respondent out of six considers that the problems related to his or her job influence even private life. Particularly alarming is the fact that nearly one in seven employees lost all pleasure of working.<sup>13</sup> The University of Bern in collaboration with Zürcher Hochschule für Angewandte Wissenschaften has estimated the economic potential for improvements at the workplace reducing job-related stress around 1% of GDP for Switzerland<sup>14</sup>. Unfortunately, this impressive development is not followed by strategies to deal with these problems. *“In Germany, mental stress is*

7 DGB (2010).

8 Kroll, Mütters & Dragano (2011).

9 Statistisches Bundesamt (2012).

10 DAK (2012); DGB (2010).

11 Eurofound (2016), p. 49.

12 International Labour Organization (2016), p. 6-8.

13 Chambre des Salariés (2016), p. 46.

14 Igic et al. (2014), p. 42.

*still smiled at, treated ironically and trivialized”*.<sup>15</sup> ILO cites the First European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER) conducted by the European Union information agency for occupational safety and health (EU-OSHA): their findings from 2009 show that *even though work-related stress was reported among the key OSH<sup>16</sup> concerns for European enterprises, only about half of the establishments surveyed reported that they inform their workers about psychosocial risks and their effects on health and safety; and less than a third reported having procedures in place to deal with work-related stress.*<sup>17</sup>

An act on health and safety in the workplace was passed by Croatia’s parliament on the 30th of May 2014<sup>18</sup>. It establishes a new governing body and builds on the previous 1996 act, now allowing employers to use audio and video monitoring devices. The act also introduces measures to help combat stress at work. The new 2014 act on health and safety not only encompasses new technology, but directly addresses stress-related issues (in Croatian). For the first time in Croatia, the new act introduces provisions and measures to protect workers from stress and stress-related illnesses caused by work. It sets out: rules to eliminate risk factors; training procedures; rules on the information and consultation of employees and their representatives. Employers are obliged to pay special attention, among other, to subjective factors (dealing with emotional and social pressures, feelings of helplessness, or feelings of insufficient support).

Meanwhile, the phenomena outlined here for the working world also apply to the education and training system in which, for example, the “Turboabitur” (fast high school graduation certificate) may be acquired after eight years instead of nine in Germany. The increased expectations of self-responsibility, self-optimisation and performance are already the defining experiences for small children, young people and whole families. Systemic interactions between work, relationships, family and leisure allow far reaching consequences of these macrosystemic changes to be expected.

Where external requirements diminish in influence, individual self-regulation is becoming increasingly important: through the elimination, as well as the fragility of normative institutions and external requirements, the regulation of everyday life is becoming more and more a personal task of the individual. This has led to significant gains in individual freedom and design possibilities, but also to a considerable increase in self-responsibility. Efficiency, health, quality of life, satisfaction and, last but not least, successful relationships are determined by a good self-regulation.

15 Bauer (2015), p. 66.

16 OSH – occupational safety and health.

17 International Labour Organization (2016), p. 6-8.

18 Narodne Novine (2014).

In the context outlined here, the VOCIS-project is intended to provide a preventive contribution for target groups of the social and health sector, and as a next step, children, adolescents and parents shall be provided with self-instructing opportunities to strengthen their self-regulation.

## Self-regulation: Cooperate well with yourself

In a predominantly psychologically oriented research, different aspects of self-regulation, purposeful for this project, have been investigated. The diversity of the sources includes specialist books and studies of personality and socio-psychological fundamental research, psychotherapeutic guiding concepts, neurobiological foundations of development and change, and other areas of research. For VOCIS, influential foundations from personality- and motivational-psychological approaches stem from Kuhl<sup>19</sup> as well as Scheffer<sup>20</sup>. The work of Roth & Ryba<sup>21</sup> on the neurobiological basis of human change and the work of Carol Dweck<sup>22</sup> in relation to the importance of static and dynamic self-images have given indications to the possibilities and limits of human change. Other useful sources are Joachim Bauer's work on self-regulation<sup>23</sup> and his study<sup>24</sup> on changes in the working world, the work of Baumeister & Tierney<sup>25</sup> on willpower, the foundations of LeDoux<sup>26</sup> regarding the importance and development of emotions and the work on the relevance of mindfulness of Neff<sup>27</sup> as well as Zimmermann, Spitz & Schmidt<sup>28</sup> and finally the work of Walsh<sup>29</sup> on the importance of life style.

This research resulted in eight theoretical constructs for the objectives of VOCIS that describe different aspects of self-regulation. These self-regulating functions include emotional, motivational, cognitive and volitional aspects and are relevant for the understanding of self-regulation and individual development processes. These dimensions are briefly outlined below.

19 Kuhl (2001 & 2010).

20 Scheffer (2005).

21 Roth & Ryba (2016).

22 Dweck (2006).

23 Bauer (2013).

24 Bauer (2015).

25 Baumeister & Tierney (2011).

26 LeDoux (1996).

27 Neff (2003).

28 Zimmermann, Spitz & Schmidt (2015).

29 Walsh (2011).

- *Self-perception*: relating to how well a person succeeds in sensing and recognizing his or her own needs, preferences and intentions, and to test them against external expectations. This includes access to one's own somatic markers and self-observation.
- *Goal orientation*: this dimension describes how effective, clear, realistic, timely, measurable and operationalised the goals are that a person pursues.
- *Willpower* involves how effectively a person converts the goals, intentions and plans that he or she has set to result-oriented and concrete action. In addition, this dimension pictures how a person can concentrate on a task, imagining success and achievement, and appropriately dividing his or her time between speed and correctness.
- *Affect regulation* describes how a person succeeds in promoting and maintaining adaptive affects and emotions for the aims pursued, and to be able to flexibly switch between negative and positive affects. It also includes how a person can cope with contradictory requirements, frustrations and internal conflicts in the pursuit of goals, and control impulses that are not goal-relevant. What is also conveyed is how a person can cope with failure, learn from mistakes and motivate him- or herself, even if he or she has no desire to do so anymore.
- *Self-reinforcement* is a dimension that describes how a person succeeds in encouraging himself, in reminding himself of tasks, in creating positive inner dialogues, strengthening him- or herself and ending disturbing thoughts.
- *Self-integration* refers to how congruent the goals and actions of individuals are with their own essential needs, values and long-term life plans and goals. It is about how authentically, internally free and autonomous a person feels about what he or she is doing.
- *Self-development* is a dimension of self-regulation, reveals how important a person values self-research, his or her own development, change and self-knowledge. As such, it is a matter of how open, curious and reflective individuals are for their own thinking, experience and behaviour, and to what extent they can take a bird's perspective on themselves.
- *Self-compassion* means how acceptable, understanding and non-judgmental a person is against his own shortcomings and mistakes. Furthermore, this dimension describes how a person can manage wise self-care, deal with malaise, and live an attitude of mindfulness.

## Development of self-regulation

A further component of the project is the development of a toolbox, which includes offers in the form of exercises and training possibilities for one or several functions of self-regulation. These offers are aimed to specifically train each function described above. For each of the functions, three effective exercises are presented. For the dimension of the affect regulation, it is important, for example, to bring about a rapid and effective self-calming and relaxation in response to a stressful event and thus to influence the emotional, cognitive and somatic experiences. With some exercises, it is possible to influence and develop simultaneously several functions. Thus, for example, respiratory exercises can have a beneficial effect on the affective regulation and, at the same time, improve self-perception.

In a simple exercise, the reader can test this for himself<sup>30</sup>. If you count in a situation of stress at the rhythm 4-4-4-4 as follows:

- Inhalation (count up to 4),
- Pause for breath (count up to 4),
- Exhale (count up to 4),
- Pause for breath (count up to 4).

This often leads to the calming of feelings, thoughts and a relaxation on the physical level. This can be intensified if as a next step in breathing and counting, you imagine that you would draw a square:

- Inhale (stitch up),
- Pause for breath (upper line),
- Exhale (stroke down),
- Pause for breath (bottom line).

The exercises differ in terms of time required from one minute up to 30 minutes, as well as in terms of level of ambition, from simple and easy to put in practice to more sophisticated strategies and techniques where daily practice over a longer period of time is beneficial or even necessary.

The methods have been identified in a search in standard works of the consulting, coaching, training and therapy practice. The guiding concepts have their origins in systemic and hypnotherapeutic schools<sup>31</sup>, humanistic psychology<sup>32</sup> and the behaviour-oriented

30 Daitch (2007).

31 Alman & Lambrou (2010); Alman (2014); Daitch (2007); Liggett (2000); Uneståhl (2011a and 2011b).

32 Kopp (2015).

relaxation practice<sup>33</sup>. In addition, aspects of the Zurich resource manual<sup>34</sup> and different approaches to mindfulness meditation<sup>35</sup> have found their entry into the training list.

## The diagnostic toolkit

How to get to an easy to use and scientifically sound instrument: VOCIS had to give an answer to that question. It started with the definition of self-regulative functions, that have a scientific fundament on the one hand and relevance for practical purposes in coaching, self-instruction and training on the other hand. The objective was to develop a toolkit that could be used by individuals and by coaches, starting with a questionnaire in order to picture the situation of the individual. This questionnaire can be evaluated by following the instruction on the PDF version (e.g. in a training) or by using the online tool (e.g. for individual use at home). This first step is linked to a series of exercises designed to improve specific self-regulative functions.

The Diagnostic Toolkit is a central product (IO<sup>36</sup>) of the VOCIS project as far as it delivers the whole process with a theoretical framework and provides the individual with information about self-regulation. Furthermore, it is interconnected with the other IOs, especially with the exercises to develop self-regulation. In a detailed research in international scientific textbooks and relevant psychological studies, the VOCIS team identified and analysed as presented above, eight distinct functions of practical impact for an individual diagnosis of self-regulation and a useful guideline for individual change. These dimensions were integrated into a questionnaire for self-assessment. This was pretested in Germany (N=25), presented and discussed in a transnational meeting and after some further development and translations tested in each partner country (total N=149). These common results were brought into a statistical analysis by the University of Zadar. The analysis led into a final version of the questionnaire, which fulfils the scientific criteria of objectivity, reliability and validity and psychological measurement. The diagnostic toolkit is available as a PDF for trainings in traditional classrooms or coaching and as an online version on the VOCIS website<sup>37</sup>. This version helps individuals to gain an immediate insight in relation to their self-regulative functions. The online tool is the centrepiece of the VOCIS virtual classroom.

VOCIS understands self-regulation skills like a muscle, which is trained by a regularly use. The diagnostic toolkit provides the individual and the coach with information about

33 Berking (2015).

34 Storch & Krause (2014).

35 Hanson (2013); Kabat-Zinn (1998); Germer (2009); Krech (2002).

36 IO – intellectual output.

37 [www.vocis.org](http://www.vocis.org).



the self-regulation in the professional area and points out strengths as well as it gives useful hints for potential development areas. This is the basis for an individualized proposal for exercises the individual can make use of either in self-instruction or with the help of a coach or in a group setting as well. For this a collection of exercises and material was researched in the fields of psychology, psychotherapy, training, counselling, coaching and meditation. In addition, a detailed description and practical guidelines to use these exercises add value to this collection. The basic structure to train self-regulation follows the principle of a traffic light: the results of the questionnaire may be green, orange or red, with increasing training necessity. Training can be more or less intense or challenging. The more one trains these exercises for a while, the easier they work and contribute to improve self-regulation. More than 50 exercises were integrated into a toolbox and after the presentation and discussion in a second transnational meeting, the team agreed to focus on two different versions: the version for the individual self-instructing user consists of three exercises per dimension, which is 24 exercises for all dimensions. The long version of the collection of exercises with further material is meant in the first place for professional coaches and trainers.

The questionnaire started with 38 items, but in order to reduce the number of questions to those really needed for the information required, a factor analysis has been conducted.

The exploratory factor analysis (maximum likelihood factors) showed that it is possible to obtain one factor for almost each of the theoretically based dimensions. As a result of the descriptive statistics, we have formed the red, orange and green scores. The scores for each dimension are formed as a result of a linear combination (red  $<M-1SD$ ; orange  $>M-1SD$  and  $<M+1SD$ ; green  $>M+1SD$ ).<sup>38</sup>

From five initial items related to the dimension *goal orientation*, three have a satisfactory factor loading, so we keep them in the final version of the questionnaire. In addition, the reliability of these three items was relatively satisfactory, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0,567.

Table 1. Factor analysis of the dimension *goal orientation*

	F	r <sub>it</sub>
1. My professional goals are attractive to me.	0,803	0,458
2. I work on specific goals set by myself.	0,739	0,371
5. My goals at work are challenging.	0,658	0,310
Eigenvalue	1,623	
% of explained variance	0,541	0,567

  

Red – less than 9	Orange – 9 to 12	Green – 13 or more
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<sup>38</sup> M – Arithmetic mean; SD – Standard deviation.

For the second dimension as well, out of five initial items related to the dimension *willpower*, three have satisfactory factor loadings, to be kept in the final version of the questionnaire. Also, the reliability of these three items was satisfactory, resulting in a Cronbach's alpha of 0,700.

Table 2. Factor analysis of the dimension <i>willpower</i>		
	F	r <sub>it</sub>
6. When I have a professional task I immediately start working on it.	0,821	0,540
7. I can concentrate well on my professional duties.	0,850	0,608
9. When doing unpleasant work tasks, I find it difficult to implement my plans. (R)	0,716	0,432
Eigenvalue	1,909	
% of explained variance	0,636	0,700

Red – less than 8	Orange – 8 to 12	Green – 13 or more
-------------------	------------------	--------------------

The *affect regulation* factor consists of just two items (instead of five initial items) but the internal reliability of this dimension is appropriate and Cronbach's alpha was 0,650.

Table 3. Factor analysis of the dimension <i>affect regulation</i>		
	F	r <sub>it</sub>
11. I remain constructive at work when something does not work out the way I had imagined.	0,861	0,481
14. I can switch flexibly between pleasant and unpleasant feelings and remain task orientated.	0,861	0,481
Eigenvalue	1,481	
% of explained variance	0,741	0,650

Red – less than 7	Orange – 7 to 8	Green – 9 or more
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Analyses of the *self-perception* and *self-reinforcement* scales resulted with keeping three items with satisfactory high factor loadings in each scale. However, reliability coefficients were just satisfactory (Cronbach's alpha were 0,514 and 0,565 respectively).

Table 4. Factor analysis of the dimension <i>self-perception</i>		
	F	r <sub>it</sub>
16. I am able to read my body's signals and if possible take a break from work when needed.	-0,738	0,350
17. I regularly check the extent to which what I am doing at work, corresponds to my own needs.	-0,647	0,359
18. When in doubt, I listen to my body signals rather than trying to meet other's expectations.	-0,747	0,279
Eigenvalue	1,522	
% of explained variance	0,507	0,514

Red – less than 7	Orange – 7 to 12	Green – 13 or more
-------------------	------------------	--------------------

**Table 5. Factor analysis of the dimension *self-reinforcement***

	<b>F</b>	<b>r<sub>it</sub></b>
20. After successfully accomplishing a work task I have several ideas to reward myself.	0,839	0,505
21. I listen to my inner voice when completing work tasks.	0,707	0,333
22. I am very self-critical and strict with myself regarding professional failures.	0,648	0,304
Eigenvalue	1,623	
% of explained variance	0,541	0,565

**Red – less than 8**

**Orange – 8 to 13**

**Green – 14 or more**

Further, the factor analysis of the *self-integration* scale resulted in keeping four items out of initially five. Also, the Cronbach's alpha of this scale was high (0,713).

**Table 6. Factor analysis of the dimension *self-integration***

	<b>F</b>	<b>r<sub>it</sub></b>
26. What I do at work is part of my long-term life plan.	-0,777	0,550
27. I can set my own goals at work.	-0,761	0,535
28. When I have a task to complete I look forward to starting it.	-0,707	0,472
29. At work, I think about the next attractive goals I would like to set for myself.	-0,686	0,450
Eigenvalue	2,153	
% of explained variance	0,538	0,713

**Red – less than 10**

**Orange – 10 to 16**

**Green – 17 or more**

Finally, the dimensions *self-development* and *self-compassion* could be treated as a single dimension which consists of four items with satisfactory internal reliability in terms of Cronbach's alpha (0,604).

**Table 7. Factor analysis of the dimensions *self-development* and *self-compassion***

	<b>F</b>	<b>r<sub>it</sub></b>
30. I find it exciting to learn new things about myself.	0,861	0,481
31. My mistakes and weaknesses contribute to my development.	0,861	0,481
36. I accept that painful experiences are a part of human life.	1,481	
38. When needed, I know what I can or cannot do to take good care of myself.	0,741	0,650
Eigenvalue	0,636	0,700
% of explained variance	0,295	

**Red – less than 13**

**Orange – 13 to 18**

**Green – 19 or more**

Although each of the dimensions could be treated independently, it is possible to form one result for a general self-regulation score. This dimension could give a score for individuals who are interested in obtaining a global result about their self-regulation strategies (Red – less than 61; Orange – 62 to 99; and Green – 100 or more).

In conclusion, we can say that the analysis permitted to cut the questionnaire down to the 22 items. This is much more user-friendly, in particular the online version with immediate results and exercises for improvement. Why is this important? VOCIS is designed to be easily accessible – the success of the project is the use made of the instruments. In an era of fast consumption of all kinds of contents, including pedagogical ones, time is an important factor of success.

Since this is a small pilot study, its limitations include the small number of participants and differences in some characteristics of the national samples that could have affected the results. Further studies should include the control of relevant variables that were not controlled in this study, such as measures of sources of stress. The results are correlational and do not imply causality between demographic variables and sources of stress and output stress measures. Further studies of stress in different samples should be performed longitudinally to gain deeper insight.

## Perspective

Further instruments for peer coaching, initial and continuous training are to be developed in 2017. A better understanding of the demographic and work factors that lead to occupational stress should subsequently help managers, teachers, students and other relevant individuals to better understand a greater proportion of the variance of employees' satisfaction, performance and turnover, and help them to better deal with it. Namely, the research of Pološki Vokic and Bogdanic<sup>39</sup> found that employees belonging to different subgroups perceive different levels of stress, and that there is a link between individual characteristics and stress. Precisely, the highest levels of stress are perceived by employees who have three or more children, who are more than 50 year old, and those employed in marketing, at middle levels or in procurement, while the lowest levels of stress are reported by employees younger than 30 years of age, those employed in HR, finances and production, and parents of one child. One source of stress that has to be particularly focussed on is the digitalization (work 4.0). The edition “DGB-Index Gute Arbeit kompakt” shows that through digitalization almost half of all employees have a higher workload, and not even every tenth employee reports a decrease<sup>40</sup>.

39 Pološki Vokic & Bogdanic (2008).

40 DGB (2016).

In accordance with VOCIS goals, the aims of further activities in and beyond VOCIS should be related to the investigation of different groups, in terms of nationality and work background. Also, there are limited data on stress levels among younger groups, so one interesting area of research will include the work with university students and high school pupils. The work around VOCIS initial training, to be developed in 2017, should give some insights for this group.

Yet the benefits of self-regulation trainings are not limited to adults. On the contrary, the Swedish school system introduced integrated mental training already in the 1970s<sup>41</sup>. This seems a far better option than waiting until people are in work and some opportunities for development have been lost meanwhile. Tranter and Kerr insist on the importance of self-regulation in educational settings: “For some children, schools might be the only place where there is consistent calm, and teachers might be the only adults who teach them the calming strategies that they will rely on for the rest of their lives.”<sup>42</sup> As poverty is an important source of stress for 26.9% of the children living in the EU<sup>43</sup> and influences their physical and social development already in the early years<sup>44</sup>, self-regulation strategies could reveal themselves as major tools for prevention. A promising area for development!<sup>45</sup>

41 Uneståhl (n.d.).

42 Tranter & Kerr (2016).

43 In 2015, around 25 million children, or 26.9% of the population aged 0 to 17 in the European Union (EU) were at risk of poverty or social exclusion. For the partner countries of VOCIS, the situation looks as follows: DE 18.5%, LU 23%, HR 29%, IE 30.3%, IT 33.5%. Eurostat (2016).

44 Holz (2008).

45 This project is co-funded by the Erasmus+ Programme of the European Union. The content of this article does not reflect the official opinion of the European Union. Responsibility for the information and views expressed here lies entirely with the author(s).

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## Appendix

### *Short version of the Diagnostic Toolkit (DT)*

For each question, the frequency has to be evaluated – the individual has to choose between (1) never, (2) rarely, (3) occasionally, (4) often and (5) always

1. My professional goals are attractive to me.
2. I work on specific goals set by myself.
3. My goals at work are challenging.
4. When I have a professional task I immediately start working on it.
5. I can concentrate well on my professional duties.
6. When doing unpleasant work tasks, I find it difficult to implement my plans.
7. I remain constructive at work when something does not work out the way I had imagined.
8. I can switch flexibly between pleasant and unpleasant feelings and remain task orientated.
9. I am able to read my body's signals and if possible take a break from work when needed.
10. I regularly check the extent to which what I am doing at work, corresponds to my own needs.
11. When in doubt, I listen to my body signals rather than trying to meet other's expectations.
12. After successfully accomplishing a work task I have several ideas to reward myself.
13. I listen to my inner voice when completing work tasks.
14. I am very self-critical and strict with myself regarding professional failures.
15. What I do at work is part of my long-term life plan.
16. I can set my own goals at work.
17. When I have a task to complete I look forward to starting it.
18. At work, I think about the next attractive goals I would like to set for myself.
19. I find it exciting to learn new things about myself.
20. My mistakes and weaknesses contribute to my development.
21. I accept that painful experiences are a part of human life.
22. When needed, I know what I can or cannot do to take good care of myself.

