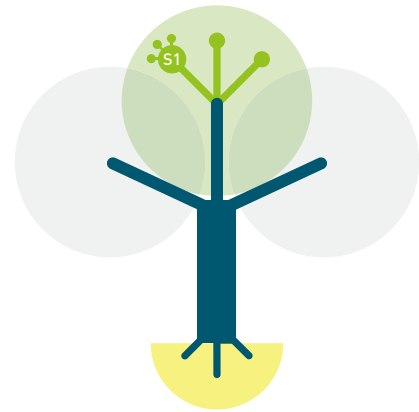


S1 Empathy



The understanding of another person's emotions, experiences and values, and the provision of appropriate responses

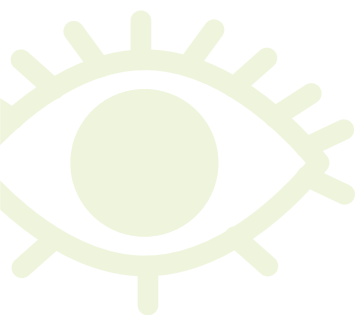
Empathy is critical for deploying other social and emotional competences, and building **positive relationships**^{15;73;74}. Empathy is at the root of all pro-social behaviours and provides a basis for coping with stress and resolving conflicts⁷⁵. It comprises three aspects⁷⁶: the ability to recognise emotions in others; to cognitively take the perspective of others and share emotional states with them; and the ability to offer an appropriate response to others' emotions.

Empathy enables effective communication, interaction and collaboration. It is pivotal for regulating prosocial behaviours while inhibiting aggressive and antisocial ones⁷⁷. Indeed, the UNESCO Working Group on Global Citizenship Education includes empathy among global citizenship competences⁷⁸. Evidence shows that human brains are **hard-wired for empathy**⁷⁹ and that the capacity of understanding and helping others has been key for the **survival of our species**. It's also well-acknowledged that empathy can be improved through specific training^{80;81}.

S1.1

Awareness of another person's emotions, experiences and values

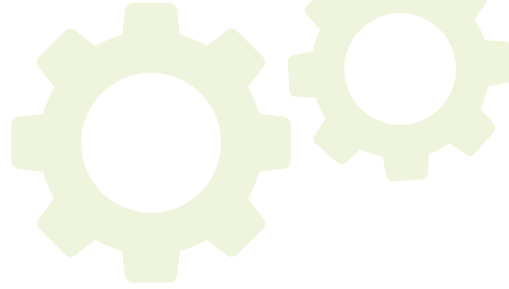
Acquiring abilities to read nonverbal cues like the tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions is key for developing empathy



This descriptor focuses on the ability to be **aware** of **other people's emotions** and values. The ability to recognise emotions in others is closely intertwined with self-awareness or the ability to identify, label, and describe one's own emotions⁸² (**Self-Regulation P1.1**). This means that the more one is aware of one's own emotions, the more one will be able to recognise others' feelings.

People can express their emotions through nonverbal communication. As human beings, we are able to accurately identify at least six basic emotions in others regardless of our cultural background: anger, disgust, fear, happiness, sadness and surprise^{83; 84}. The ability to **read nonverbal cues** like tone of voice, gestures, and facial expressions is, therefore, key to this descriptor. This is also the case for the digital world, where digital nonverbal cues such as emoticons are used to make emotions more explicit⁸⁵.

Empathy leads to **affective resonance**, which is the automatic capacity to be emotionally aroused by others' emotions⁸⁶. It also involves awareness of diversity, the ability to acknowledge and accept that people from different cultures may hold different values or have different experiences, and that this is part of the richness of humanity.



S1.2

Understanding another person's emotions and experiences, and the ability to proactively take their perspective

Training own self-awareness and self-empathy enhances the ability to understand others and to reduce personal distress when confronted with others' feelings



This descriptor stresses the ability to take the perspective of another person, while maintaining a separation between one's emotions and experiences and those of others. It entails the cognitive ability to make inferences, "read" others' minds, imagine how the other person perceives a specific situation and how that person feels. The capacity to **understand other people's emotions** is one of the pillars of social understanding, which is key to effective communication (S2) and collaboration (S3). The ability to take people's perspective does not necessarily imply endorsing them. Thus, it is possible to empathise with someone, and still disagree with their attitudes or values.

There are two ways of taking the perspective of others: one can imagine how the other person feels or how one would feel in the same situation. These two processes may lead to different emotional outcomes^{87;88}. The first is found to evoke more empathetic emotions and altruistic behaviours, while the second is found to evoke mixed feelings of empathy and personal distress (e.g. feeling alarmed, disturbed, or troubled) which, if excessive, can lead to emotional disengagement to relieve one's negative emotional state. **Training** one's own **self-awareness** and **self-empathy** enhances the ability to understand others and to reduce personal distress when confronted with others' feelings⁸⁹.

S1.3

Responsiveness to another person's emotions and experiences, being conscious that group belonging influences one's attitude

Educational interventions aimed at increasing the ability of perspective-taking, developing self-awareness, and providing positive experiences of otherness help in developing empathy



This descriptor focuses on the motivational aspect of empathy, the ability to offer an appropriate response to others' emotions to alleviate their distress. **Empathic concern**, the capacity to feel congruent emotions (i.e. with the same positive or negative valence) and experiencing feelings of sympathy, compassion, tenderness, and sorrow, among others, while observing another person is a related concept. Empathic concern may lead to compassionate pro-social behaviour aimed at mitigating others' suffering.

It is important to stress that those **pro-social behaviours** are **intentional**, and several interconnected factors mediate the decision on whether to engage in them or not. Individuals tend to have more empathy for others who look or act like them, for others who have suffered in a similar way and, in general, for people belonging to the same social group (e.g. same race, ethnicity, political, or religious affiliation, etc.). **Empathic failure** towards out-group members is a well-known phenomenon⁹⁰ that may lead not only to attenuated empathic response, but also to counter-empathic responses. To counter this tendency **cognitive empathy** may play a role when a lack of emotional empathy exists because of racial, ethnic, religious, or physical differences⁹¹.

A meta-analytic study with American students showed a decline in empathic concern and ability to take the perspective of others⁹² due to an increase in narcissism and individualism, growing exposure to violence, time spent online and on social media, and the consequent decline of face-to-face interactions. A change in parenting style and an increase in the expectations of achievement and success of students may contribute to this phenomenon. However, just as some circumstances may lead to a decrease in empathy, others may lead to an increase, since people can learn how to be empathetic. More specifically, **educational interventions** aimed at increasing the ability to take others' perspectives, develop self-awareness, and provide positive experiences of otherness **help in developing empathy**^{93,94,95}.



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The European Framework for
Personal, Social and **Learning
to Learn** Key Competence

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