

***food-vendors.org* Briefing Papers**



Briefing Paper #6: Food vendor skills & competencies

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This Briefing Paper is intended to help those designing interventions that support the professional development of food vendors in Low- and Lower-Middle Income Countries

Paper #3 in this series (1) showed that food vendors in Low- and Lower-Middle Income Countries (L(M)ICs) execute complicated tasks and navigate diverse relationships as they go about delivering their products to their customers. Paper #5 in this same series (2) further develops the evidence around the challenges that food vendors face at different levels, from the personal (rooted primarily in psychology) through to the societal (regulation, enforcement, and culture). Navigating these challenges requires a robust mix of knowledge, skills and competences. Pinpointing the priority skills and competences needed allows the design of more effective professional development support for this group of workers.

Methodology

This paper follows Winterton and co-authors (3) in considering that knowledge, skills, and social attitudes and behaviours are all important dimensions of professional competence. In a framework that now underpins the European Qualifications Framework, these authors settle on a clear three-way distinction which we refer to in this paper: *cognitive* competence (theoretical understanding, facts, information, and concepts, commonly referred to as “knowledge”); *functional* competence (the ability to apply knowledge and use know-how to complete tasks and solve problems, commonly referred to as “skills”), and *social and meta-competence*, which are behaviours and attitudes which go beyond the purely occupational and include the ability to acquire new competences (meta-competence). Because functional competence is more predictive of business success than cognitive competence (2), and because the core knowledge that food vendors need is relatively self-evident, the rest of this paper focuses on functional, social, and meta-competence.

The paper draws on two reference databases which systematically codify skills and competences and link them to professions. **ESCO** (European Skills, Competences, Qualifications and Occupations) (4) is a digital “dictionary” that conveniently identifies three occupations that are directly related to food vendors as defined in (5): market vendors, street food vendors, and “retail entrepreneurs”. For each of these occupations, the database lists: Essential Skills & Competences; Optional Skills & Competences; Essential Knowledge, and Optional Knowledge. The Skills & Competences in this reference are highly domain-specific and are what Winterton and co-authors would call “functional competences”. The few Skills & Competences that were obviously not relevant for the current scope—mostly limited to the “retail entrepreneurs” category, which can include more complex businesses—are not reported here.

O*NET (Occupational Information Network) is a national framework created by the United States Department of Labor. O*NET's occupational codes map less cleanly to our definition of food vendors, with relevant codes including: 41-9091.00 (Door-to-Door Sales Workers, News and Street Vendors, and Related Workers), 41-2031.00 (Retail Salespersons) and 35-3023.00 (Fast Food and Counter Workers). What is called "Skills & Competences" in the ESCO database corresponds, for these categories at least, closely to the "Detailed Work Activities" in O*NET; very similar specific items are identified across the two systems. However, O*NET also identifies a set of "Transferable" skills which are cross-functional skills that support independent problem-solving and adaptivity across different roles.

Results

ESCO Skills & Competences

Very similar Skills & Competences are listed for the three ESCO "occupations" under consideration. Sometimes, the lack of convergence across the three is hard to justify and more elements have been moved to "Common" in the following tables.

Stocking and inventory management

<u>Common:</u> Identify suppliers (E ¹) Unload supplies (O) Maintain relationship with suppliers (O) Organise product display (E) Ensure product preparation (O) Inspect merchandise (E) Maintain work area cleanliness (E)		
<u>Additional</u> for: Market vendors	Street food vendors	Retail entrepreneurs
Perform manual work autonomously (O)	Use cooking techniques (E); Clean kitchen equipment (O); Execute chilling processes to food products (E)	

¹¹ E=Essential, O=Optional, as listed in ESCO

Customer engagement and sales

<u>Common:</u> Assist customers (E) Guarantee customer satisfaction (E) Carry out active selling (O) Upsell products (O) Agree on prices (O) Process customer payments (E)		
<u>Additional</u> for: Market vendors	Street food vendors	Retail entrepreneurs
		Operate cash register

Business administration

<u>Common:</u> Build business relationships (E) Arrange permit for [outlet] (E) Implement sales strategies [for competitive advantage] (E) Control of expenses (E) Study sales levels of products (E) Manage staff (O)		
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O*NET Transferable Skills

The transferable skills are similar between the three codes considered here (35-3023.00 is entirely subsumed in the other two list). This is not surprising, as Transferable Skills are precisely those competencies which allow a worker to move between occupations with ease.

Occupation code	
41-9091.00	41-2031.00
• Persuasion — Persuading others to change their minds or behaviour. • Social Perceptiveness — Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do. • Service Orientation — Actively looking for ways to help people. • Coordination — Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions. • Negotiation — Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences. • Judgment and Decision Making — Considering the relative costs and benefits of potential actions to choose the most appropriate one	• Persuasion — Persuading others to change their minds or behavior. • Service Orientation — Actively looking for ways to help people. • Negotiation — Bringing others together and trying to reconcile differences. • Social Perceptiveness — Being aware of others' reactions and understanding why they react as they do. • Coordination — Adjusting actions in relation to others' actions. • Time Management — Managing one's own time and the time of others.

Conclusions

- Cognitive, functional, and social competences together allow food vendors to ply their trades successfully.
- While the European (ESCO) and North American (O*NET) reference databases of occupations and their related skills and competences use different terminology and occupational classes, they share a remarkably similar view of the functional competences food vendors need.
- ESCO further identifies a set of cognitive competences (knowledge) for each occupation, while O*NET identifies "Transferable Skills", social and systemic/management competences which permit professionals to function with contextual autonomy.
- Professional development programmes for food vendors in L(M)ICs should try and ensure that all relevant elements of professional competence are covered, not forgetting the social competencies that can be 'make or break' in a complex work context.

References

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