

PIN



EQF Praxis and Information Network

PIN - EQF-Praxis and Information Network

Final Report

Public Part

Project information

Project acronym:	PIN
Project title:	EQF-Praxis and Information Network
Project number:	510698-2010-LLP-DE-LEONARDO-LNW
Sub-programme or KA:	Thematic networks
Project website:	http://www.eqf-pin.eu/
Reporting period:	From 01/01/2011 To 31/12/2013
Report version:	1
Date of preparation:	28/02/2014
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This project has been funded with support from the European Commission.

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Executive Summary

The European Qualification Framework (EQF) opens a new chapter with regard to transnational mobility of employees in Europe. It offers the chance to make qualifications visible and more comparable and transparent from country to country.

For trade unions this development is an important challenge as it is their imperative to enforce the interests of employees. The PIN-project aims at analyzing the possible consequences the EQF will have on the especially low qualified employees and what challenges must be met to improve the situation. The EQF shall in the future lead to the recognition of competences and also contribute to the upgrading of low qualified workers as well as to more mobility and recognition of competences.

The PIN-network comprises 15 partners and 25 associated partners from 14 countries with different learning cultures.

The PIN-network organized focus groups in the partner countries to discuss with works councils, researchers and practitioners the expected outcome the EQF will have in their respective country. One result of the first phase of PIN was that due to some delays on the political level in some of the countries the consequences of the implementation of the EQF are in some degree yet unclear. But nevertheless, it became very clear that some key questions need to be addressed by PIN:

- Recognition of non-formal and informal competences
- Systems of validation of non formal and informal learning outcomes: How could they be promoted and what are the success factors?
- What is the “currency of qualifications”? Does qualification possibly lead to higher wages?
- Good practices regarding the impact of the EQF on wage systems

The PIN-network organized 2-5 focus groups per country which gave feedback on the consequences of the EQF. The results were aggregated in national impact analyses and a European strategy. Checklists, training material and guidelines were developed for the use of workers’ representatives, consultants, researchers and trade union representatives in the appliance of the NQF. As one result the impact analyses revealed that recognition of non-formal and informal competences as one key issue during the implementation process of the EQF needs to be highlighted in the debate. In at least 22 workshops multipliers were educated in the practice of the EQF/RNIFL. A learning platform and forum as a market place of ideas were established to help to spread the information and identify good practices. Therefore a participatory discourse and a critical perspective on the EQF implementation lead the partners in their project work.

The expected impact will be and the dissemination activities aim at the better handling of stakeholders and external specialists in the handling of questions connected with the EQF and of recognition of non-formal and informal competences and accompanying instruments and their empowerment in the support of employees’ interests.

Table of Contents

1. PROJECT OBJECTIVES.....	5
2. PROJECT APPROACH.....	6
3. PROJECT OUTCOMES & RESULTS.....	8
4. PARTNERSHIPS	10
5. PLANS FOR THE FUTURE	12
6. CONTRIBUTION TO EU POLICIES	13
7. EXTRA HEADING/SECTION.....	15

1. Project Objectives

The aim of the project PIN – Praxis and Information Network is to build up a network and organizational framework for the spread of information on the impact the EQF will have on the situation of the workforce in Europe. Therefore it is foreseen to initiate a structured dialogue between trade unions as the important representation of employees, researchers, political actors and practitioners. The dialogue aims at debating, researching, empowering, connecting and advising the relevant actors.

Debating: Key actors and actors close to the situation of the workforce are invited to debate with the project partners in a structured and steered debate about the EQF and its impact. On the national level in each of the country national focus groups were organized to initiate a debate and to collect the information. From this starting point a strategy has been developed highlighting the main aspects connected with the EQF. A learning platform and a forum as the market place of ideas for further discussion are the starting point for debate and networking of the stakeholders in the partner countries.

Researching: National focus groups were set up in the partner countries to discuss key aspects on the basis of a common guideline. Researchers, representatives from trade unions, enterprises and training organizations, actors at the political level and consultants participated in a research on the impact of the EQF.

Empowering: A strategy was developed to assist the actors for their orientation regarding the EQF and to strengthen them in debates. The strategy will be accompanied by guidelines and training material.

Connecting: The structures of an enduring network and organizational framework were developed to serve as a contact point for researchers and practitioners from trade unions and political sphere for a quick first-to-hand info and a framework, where questions both on practical as on organizational-conceptual issues can be raised.

Advising: In the second phase of the project the instructing and advising of the stakeholders were be focussed. Workshops and individual trainings and debates were foreseen to promote and disseminate the results and products of the project.

In each phase of the project PIN aimed at targeting actors which are connected with education themes and the validation of competences and further education from trade unions, administration, consulting and research to put together knowledge and to make more benefit out of it. They will be sensitized and be made more competent in their respective field of work – and are empowered to take part in transparent and stringent debates on the EQF and in the implementation of the EQF.

2. Project Approach

PIN – Praxis and information Network aims at developing a network of organizations and actors which are connected with the EQF especially from the employees side of view. An exchange of information will be organized in which trade unions, training providers, administration bodies, enterprises, research institutions and consultants participate.

The approach of this three year project is to produce in the first year the relevant data with regard on the impact of the EQF. In the second year a strategy was developed which will be accompanied by training material and guidelines which will be customized to the national needs by the partners. In the third year dissemination activities took place by the implementation of working groups and information events for the relevant stakeholders.

Project management: To facilitate a stringent and effective project management the partners meet at least once a year to exchange on the project progress and concerns regarding the implementation of the agreed actions. A core management unit was established to agree on key questions regarding the project management and results. It was also a task of the CMU to keep the project with regard to the project aims on track and to take care that it is taking the right direction.

Added value: PIN's special approach is to work with focus groups as national pillars and experts on the implementation of the NQFs in the member states. The members of the focus groups – political actors, trade unions, research institutions, consulting organizations – know best what the impact in the member state will be. Also they function as stake holders of the project as through the exchange with other participants they learn about other perspectives and positions to be taken into consideration. The focus groups also serve as the starting point of a national communication and information structure. The learning platform and the forums as market places of ideas worked as an additional instrument for learning and identifying good practices. Stakeholders had the opportunity to get into contact with experts and had the opportunity to enlarge their knowledge.

During the first year all partners organized at least 2-5 focus group meetings to discuss the impact of the EQF. A guideline (questionnaire) was produced to raise the relevant questions in each of the focus groups and to make the results comparable. The partners had to describe the national education system, the situation of the recognition of non formal and informal learning. They also had to fill in a SWOT-analysis on the opportunities and threats the EQF will have on the situation in their country. The data are the basis for further conceptual decisions and strategies.

During the second year in March 2012 the partners agreed on a strategy as the common understanding about the further direction the EQF and its implementation shall be discussed in the member states to gain the biggest benefit for the partners and the stakeholders. The partners produced guidelines including a national valorisation strategy and checklists for implementation of the EQF and especially recognition of non-formal and informal learning from the employee point of view in the respective country. The European guidelines were adjusted to the national needs.

In the third year after finalization of the guidelines and their adaption to the national needs the partner organized workshops, face-to-face trainings and discussions and planned dissemination events. They also used a brochure and the training material to discuss the results of Pin and the involve stakeholders into the forum discussions and learning platform.

Each meeting has been evaluated on the quality of the meeting (organization and agenda). Quality indicators were developed to identify the quality of the products. The website is evaluated on clicks and contributions, the strategy whether it fits the questions as they were raised by the focus groups. All partners had the opportunity to contribute with their own ideas to the quality development of the project. At each stage it was possible to contribute new fields and aspects to the debate and to highlight special needs on the national level. In the national adaption of the guidelines also benchmarks, good practices and examples with regard to learning outcomes regarding the EQF and recognition of non-formal and informal competences were identified and described. External evaluations contributed valuable and practical ideas to bring forward EQF and recognition of non-formal and informal competences.

The results of the project are proactively disseminated. All products can be downloaded from the website www.eqf-pin.eu which offers also other information regarding the EQF and RNFIL (policy papers of the EU, positions of the trade unions, addresses and contact points of partners and stakeholders in the PIN member countries). The dissemination strategy worked on two levels: members of the focus groups were contacted and informed on the aims and results of the project. They were involved by direct exchange of information and communication (methodology of focus groups). In the progress of the project through working groups and target oriented information events the stakeholders were involved and received information (guidelines, training materials) by direct face-to-face-communication and working groups. The final conference was used to inform the broader public on the aims and strategy of the project. Through this conference the federations of trade unions and other organizations on the European level, die European Commission and other institutions acting on the European level were informed. The learning platform and the forums served as pillar for exchange of information and to raise questions.

3. Project Outcomes & Results

The result of the project PIN will be the establishment of a European competence network and an organisational framework which brings together experts, practitioners and policy makers from European countries. The focus of the network is the impact of the EQF on the European countries which must be taken into consideration. The result will therefore be information material (training material and guidelines, an IT-based communication and learning platform and an established network of the relevant stakeholders for exchange of information and development of good practice.

One major result of the work of the focus groups was that it is quite unclear what the real impact of the EQF on the situation of the workforce will be. The impact depends on the process of EQF implementation which is yet in many member countries not much advanced. Nevertheless, it was brought up to light that questions will be raised connected with the EQF and its successful implementation which must be focussed on e.g. the recognition of non formal and informal competences, currency of education (effect on payment), negotiation and bargaining.

The project addresses stakeholders in trade unions, political bodies and administration dealing especially with education, training organizations, research institutions and consultants. PIN intends to grade up competences and knowledge on EQF for practical use and political debate.

The results of the project will be reached by the following steps:

Step 1: National impact analysis

Each partner country organized focus groups. Member of the focus groups are the national partners, associated partners and stakeholders and experts. On the base of guidelines key questions on the impact of the EQF were discussed. National impact analyses were produced and amalgamated into a report. One major result of the impact analysis was that recognition of non-formal and informal competences as an issue of the EQF will have impact on the situation of employees and their representatives.

Step 2: European Strategy

On the base of the national impact analysis a strategy was derived. The strategy aims at setting the thematically agenda of the network regarding the focus of the network concerning the further implementation process of the EQF.

The European strategy was adapted to the national needs and national action plans were developed.

Step 3: Training Material and Guidelines

Training material, checklists and guidelines are developed and adapted to the national needs. This does also include guidelines regarding the recognition and validation of non formal and informal competences.

The training material (incl. checklists and guidelines) will be subject of working groups and information events in 2013 organized on the national level for transfer of information and building up of competences and knowledge of the stakeholders.

Step 4: Learning platform

A learning platform has been developed for debate and exchange of information. The contributions are collected and further guidelines are developed. Also forums were established of market places for exchange of ideas. There are debates in thematically structured focus groups.

Step 5: Quality management

The quality of the project and its products (strategy) are regularly evaluated by interviews (report of participants, feedback) and monitoring.

Step 6: Dissemination

The stakeholders were addressed during the work of the focus groups. The results were reflected to the participants and are ready for download on the website.

Workshops and information events were planned for transfer of information. These actions have been planned on the national level and focussed on the relevant themes on the national level.

The website www.eqf-pin.eu provides the user with general information on the EQF, related themes on European and national aspects, addresses of relevant contact points and the national partners. The strategy can be downloaded from the website.

A European conference was organized in Brussels on 19th November 2013 to discuss the implementation of the EQF and the impact it will have on the situation of the workforce in Europe.

4. Partnerships

PIN comprises 15 partners from 14 countries as the core of the network and 25 associated partners. The partners are trade unions and training providers, administrative bodies, consulting companies and research institutions and European organisations. It is a strong partnership which combines knowledge on the angle of politics and workers' representation, research and practitioners and therefore makes it possible to rise synergies which would otherwise not exist in a similar quality.

Partners:

- Industriegewerkschaft Metall (IGM / DE)
- Berufsbildungswerk (bfw / DE)
- IFES Instituto de Formación y Estudios Sociales (IFES / ES)
- IDEAS Institute (IRL)
- Konfederacija Sindikatov Javnega Sektorja Slovenije (KSJS / SLO)
- Österreichisches Institut für Berufsbildungsforschung (öibf / AT)
- South Birmingham College (SBC / UK)
- Cofora BV (NL)
- Unión General de Trabajadores – País Valenciano (UGT-PV / ES)
- Provincia Autonoma di Trento – Ufficio Fondo Sociale Europeo (PAT / IT)
- Związek Zawodowy Przemysłu Elektromaszynowego (ZZPE / PL)
- Związek Nauczycielstwa Polskiego (ZNP / PL)
- Unification of Lithuanian Metalworkers' Trade Union (LITMETAL / LIT)
- Vasas Szakszervezeti Szövetség (VASAS / HU)
- European Trade Union Institute (ETUI)

The list of associated partners comprises trade unions, enterprises, administrative bodies and federations also of three additional countries which are not partner countries.

As social partners the trade unions are directly involved in aspects connected with the representation of workers' rights and interests especially themes regarding education and qualification and bargaining. As members in relevant bodies and committees on the national policy level they are directly involved in the designing of the education environment.

The partners are all part of their own transnational networks which they apply to disseminate the results of PIN and to involve them into debates with the partners. All partners are experienced in European project management. The coverage of the partnership with organizations from all parts of Europe identifies the network as a real European Network representing a large and strong number of people and interests. Through the impact analyses in each of the country all aspects, interests and

arguments of the partners are taken into account not depending on the size of the respective country.

All partners contributed to the dissemination of the project by activating their networks and key actors regarding the exchange of information, analyses and dissemination of the information PIN provides them. The trade unions reach by using their member lists and organizational magazines their national target groups of PIN as well as organizations on the transnational level (ETUI, EMF). By doing so, they contributed as a network to the sensitization and knowledge of employees and multipliers. All partners helped to validate results and to provide information on the implementation process.

5. Plans for the Future

According to the work program the deepening of the network and the preparation and implementation of dissemination activities are foreseen. The products are

1. Training materials
2. Learning platform and Website
3. Dissemination

Ad 1: Training Material

Training material, checklists and guidelines have been developed and adapted to the national needs. This does also include guidelines regarding the recognition and validation of non formal and informal competences.

All material is distributed to the national stakeholder groups and deepened for further debate. ETUI will disseminate the results on the European level to its member organisation also in those countries which are not part of the PIN network.

Ad 2: Learning Platform and Website

A learning platform has been developed for debate and exchange of information. The contributions are collected and further guidelines are developed. There are debates in thematically structured focus groups. The learning platform and debates in focus groups will be opened to the general public. Stakeholders are addressed individually also by use of organizational member and address lists. The membership of the partners in bodies on the organizational and political level is used for information on the website and the contribution of the project in general.

The website www.eqf-pin.eu provides the user with general information on the EQF, related themes on European and national aspects, addresses of relevant contact points and the national partners. The strategy can be downloaded from the website.

Further information on the EQF and the implementation of the NQFs in the member states will be provided on the website.

A business plan has been agreed on which will be set into force during the next year. Key stone of the business plan is the production of a learning model and the establishment of learning loops. The model which has been developed – a model for implementation systems of recognition of non-formal and informal competences – which is based on quality levels and indicators will be further developed and starting point of a certification systems which will make the platform (subject to a charge).

6. Contribution to EU policies

The EQF aims at advancing mobility of the workforce in Europe. According to the New Skills for new Jobs-Initiative of the EU (2009) the upgrading of employees is an important issue in a sustainable European labour market. The EQF also promotes the upgrading of low qualified employees and people with migrant background as postulated by studies of CEDEFOP (“2010 in view”, 2008). CEDEFOP also made clear that with regard to the adaption of the EQF and the EQFs in the member countries it would be essential that the states “speak with one voice” (Cedefop 2008).

The PIN project contributes to these policies on the following levels:

1. European Cooperation and exchange of Ideas

In a multilateral environment it becomes more and more essential to exchange ideas and positions. Good practices must be identified to allow their transfer into other countries. In most of the partner countries the social partners participate in the implementation process of the NQFs. The fine tuning between the actors is a precondition of the successful implementation and approval of the NQF by the people and actors. PIN ensures that a transfer of information on the EQF from countries which implemented the EQF already to countries which are just in process. It also secures a structured dialogue of experts between countries which implemented the EQF already and those who are still implementing it.

The learning platform and its further development is subject of a business plan. The aim is to establish and maintain a sustainable network.

2. Empowerment of actors

The success of the implementation of the NQF depends on the competence of the actors who will use the NQF. PIN strengthens the actors by implementing a structured learning process and information transfer from the European and network level to the partner countries. The respective information needs of the countries depend on the situation of the countries. PIN supplies the partners with a transnational strategy and tool box which can be adapted and used for a better implementation of the NQF. The instruments applied by the project are: 1. focus groups meetings on the national level with stakeholders to analyze the expected consequences of the NQF in the country (impact analysis), 2. a transnational strategy as the starting point for a common approach, 3. training materials, checklists and guidelines for the dissemination, 4. a learning platform for exchange of good practices, needs and information between the project partners and stakeholder, 5. project meetings and a final conference in Brussels in 2013.

The guidelines include information on the EQF and recognition of non-formal and informal competences in general and in detail. Advantages and challenges are explained, the situation in Europe and on the national level is described and the user (employees and their representatives, trade union officials and trainers, researchers, consultants, political actors) get some very useful information how to implement recognition systems and how they can do it personally. The exchange of information

provides them with access to key actors (they can discuss in the forums), the website gives a useful overview on key information in the related field, and the guidelines provides the reader with a tool box, a checklist and good praxis examples.

3. Production of good practices and solutions

The implementation process of the EQF and the national Qualification Frameworks is still in process. This means that there is still a need to identify good practices and to transfer information on the NQF as such and on strategies. The PIN project contributes to the European aims by a contribution not only on technical questions but by opening the perspective on questions related on the situation of the people. As PIN combines actors from trade unions from 14 countries in Europe it represents the workforce in the implementation process of the EQF.

The guidelines provide the reader with useful information on

- the background information on the EQF and recognition of non-formal and informal competences
- challenges and threats connected with the EQF and recognition from a employee point of view
- a proposal on how to implement practical systems of recognition non-formal and informal learning in organizations and companies
- a tool box including checklists and examples for self assessment
- good praxis examples

7. Extra Heading/Section

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