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## **Improving qualification for elderly assistants - IQEA Evolution**

Final Report

Public Part

## Project information

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## Executive Summary

Aim of IQEA was to develop and test an ECVET agreement among training agencies from Italy, Romania and Poland for the professional profile of the elderly care assistant, providing assistance either at home or in nursing facilities.

The care sector is indeed characterized by a relevant number of workers in mobility, coming from Romania and Poland towards Italy but also – as a most recent phenomenon – trained in Italy but willing to go back to their home countries.

The agreement allows students to have training credits recognized in all the territories of experimentation to achieve the needed qualification, regardless of the training institution issuing the diploma, thus improving their employability opportunities and supporting the mobility experience.

Ultimately, aims of IQEA are the transparency of qualification and the support to the mobility of care workers across Europe.

This results have been reached through a shared process of: identification of professional profiles, identification of a common curriculum and learning outcomes, identification of quality standards, signing of a Memorandum of Understanding and testing of the whole process in the three countries involved.

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# 1. Project Objectives

The final objective of IQEA was to support recognition and transparency of competences acquired by learners from Italy, Romania and Poland in the field of care of older persons, thus to support geographical mobility in this sector.

Intermediate target group of IQEA are training providers from Italy (Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia Region), Romania and Poland that, in the framework of an ECVET agreement, are in measure to mutually recognize the training provided by other partner organizations in the field of care of older persons.

Final target groups are men and women from Italy, Romania and Poland participating in vocational training courses to obtain qualifications to work in the field of care of older persons and interested in having their skills recognized in a country or in a region different from that in which the diploma was issued.

Indeed, the rate of care workers from Romania and Poland currently working in the Italian labour market is high – for instance, Italy is – after Germany – the favourite destination for Polish migrant workers (over 100.000 esteemed in Italy). On the other hand, more recently Poland and Romania are also showing a shortage in care staff which is leading care workers trained in Italy to consider a return in their home country. Nevertheless, these workers in mobility are still facing relevant difficulties in having recognized the training acquired in a different country, thus compromising their employability and career opportunities.

IQEA aims to develop tools that can support training agencies and, ultimately, national authorities in the process of mutual acknowledgment and recognition of skills acquired by trainees.

## 2. Project Approach

In order to achieve its aims, the IQEA partnership have taken the following steps towards a definition and implementation of the ECVET agreement:

- 1) Identification of the professional profiles and qualifications on which the project is going to work with in each country
- 2) A joint definition of learning outcomes and related indicators, object of mutual recognition
- 3) A Joint definition of common standards for training delivery
- 4) A Joint definition of procedures to assess the learning
- 5) An agreement on the number of ECVET credit acknowledgeable

Given these common outcomes, the partnership has developed and signed a pilot ECVET agreement which was the background for the pilot testing of the IQEA process in the three countries.

The testing concerned either formal training courses and activities aimed to the validation of skills acquired informally and non-formally.

The testing was carefully monitored and its results analysed in order to fine-tune the whole process and come to its final definition and implementation.

Finally, a final version of the ECVET Memorandum of Understanding was released.

### 3. Project Outcomes & Results

The outcomes released by the partnership are the following:

- (1) A background document illustrating policies on care of older persons in the countries involved (Italy, Poland and Romania), to contextualise the settings in which the project was implemented
- (2) A document illustrating the main professional profiles (7, overall) in the field of care of older people in Italy, Romania and Poland: their characteristics, working contexts, training required, main tasks performed etc. This activity was a pre-requirement in order to better understand the level of autonomy in performing the tasks, the training required and ultimately the skills necessary to perform these activities. As a result of this activity, the partnership agreed on which profiles IQEA should work.
- (3) A document illustrating the learning outcomes and the related competence indicators for each of the activities identified, in terms of knowledge, capacities and skills; the amount of hours dedicated to each L.O. in the different curricula and the identification of the didactic modules that could be object of mutual recognition among the different countries involved and attributing them ECVET credits.
- (4) A document comparing a list of quality indicators in the provision of training in the agencies involved in the partnership.
- (5) A document gathering a set of assessment tools in use in the different countries, which could have been adopted by the partner agencies as a common, minimum assessment of acquired skills.
- (6) A report of the pilot testing activities, where the above mentioned tools have been used by over 220 students to assess their usability and fitness for purpose.
- (7) An ECVET agreement, regulating the procedures for mutual acknowledgment of training credits among signing institutions

Besides to these “core” outcomes, the partnership as also released dissemination and exploitation tools:

- (1) A project website ([www.igea.eu](http://www.igea.eu)) – where all project outcomes are downloadable by interested parties
- (2) A brochure in four languages, briefly illustrating the project and its outcomes
- (3) A booklet, retracing all the steps taken to define the ECVET agreement and the outcomes of the experimentation phase
- (4) A video (subtitled in Italian, Polish and Romanian) where trainers, trainees and stakeholders involved in the IQEA project have been interview in order to describe their experiences and the benefits they think they got from their participation to IQEA
- (5) A Linkedin group to promote a discussion on the issue of ECVET in the Care Field

The partnership also promoted dissemination events, such as:

- (1) Transnational conferences (in Friuli Venezia Giulia, Romania and Sardinia)
- (2) Regional workshops, held three times in the lifespan of the project, to update local stakeholders with project progresses

## 4. Partnerships

The IQEA partnership is made of organizations coming from Italy, Poland, Romania and Germany:

Italy:

- EXFOR is a training agency located in Cagliari (Sardinia) working since 2002 in the human resources development and vocational training, with a special focus on work and social policies. EXFOR is the general project coordinator: it bears the responsibility of the whole project management, it is the reference point for EACEA and takes care of the financial management of the project. It is also the coordinator of activities which take place in Sardinia: it collects information on local professional profiles and training curricula, validates the project outcomes with local stakeholders, pilot test the MoU / ECVET process in Sardinia.
- ANZIANI E NON SOLO is a no profit organization working since 2004 in the field of research on VET for care workers, including how to validate their informally acquired skills. ANS is the scientific coordinator of the project, responsible for the delivery of ECVET related outcomes. ANS develops the methodology for the implementation of the system, gathers all the information provided by partners and elaborates them in the framework of the ECVET process. ANS supervises the pilot testing and the training for trainers and supports EXFOR in the project management with the function of project secretariat. ANS takes also care of coordinating dissemination activities.
- KAIROS CONSULTING is a company providing – since 1990 – vocational training, human resources development and consultancy services. Kairos is responsible for monitoring activities: it identifies the indicators, develop the questionnaires, collect the data provided by partners and elaborates them in monitoring reports. Kairos is also the coordinator of activities in Friuli Venezia Giulia: it collects information on local professional profiles and training curricula, validates the project outcomes with local stakeholders, pilot test the MoU / ECVET process in Friuli Venezia Giulia.

- **SARDINIA AND FRIULI VENEZIA GIULIA REGIONAL ADMINISTRATIONS:** the IQEA partnership involves the VET departments of the regional administrations of Sardinia and Friuli Venezia Giulia, where the pilot experimentations of the project will take place (in Italy, VET is a responsibility of Regional Administration and not of the central government). Both administrations supports local coordinators in involving local stakeholders, assures the application of the developed methodologies in the local VET systems and support the mainstreaming of the project in local VET policies.

#### Romania

- **ASSOCIATION HABILITAS** is an association providing since 2007 professional adult training and counseling service for the social, psychological and educational projects and programme. Habiltas coordinates the activities in Romania: it collects information on local professional profiles and training curricula, validates the project outcomes with local stakeholders, pilot test the MoU / ECVET process in Romania.

#### Poland

- **ASSOCIATION TRANSFER** – is a non-profit organization established in 1997 by a group of VET and CVET experts with the aim to contribute to the development of knowledge society by promoting lifelong learning, in particular through activities improving the quality and attractiveness of VET. Transfer coordinates the activities in Poland: it collects information on local professional profiles and training curricula, validates the project outcomes with local stakeholders, pilot test the MoU / ECVET process in Poland.

#### Germany

- **INSTITUT ARBEIT UND TECHNIK** – is the joint research institute of the University of Applied Science in Gelsenkirchen and the Medical Faculty of the Ruhr University Bochum. Its major focus of research is the development of the health care sector in an international comparative approach. IAT, thanks to its previous experience in ECVET in the care field, works as supervisor and internal evaluator of the project.

The partnership foresees a project coordinator which has the overall responsibility of the project and a steering committee (composed by a representative of each partner organization) which has the role of taking all the strategic decisions, assure the respect of tasks, commitments and deadlines.

Within the partnership, roles are distributed according to specific skills and competences of each member and individual expertise are enhanced. Also, great importance is given to partners' roots on local contexts, in order to allow the involvement of local stakeholders as well as the maximum mainstreaming.

## 5. Plans for the Future

The ECVET agreement is now a reality, having been signed by three IQEA partners.

The main aims of IQEA partnership are now:

- on one hand to continue implementing the agreement with more students belonging to signing organizations, making the ECVET agreement an “ordinary” part of the training delivered
- on the other hand to encourage more organizations, especially if coming from Regions / Countries not represented in the original partnership, to sign the Memorandum, thus broadening the opportunities for students interested in mobility and employers willing to recruit qualified staff coming from different countries.

## 6. Contribution to EU policies

The project deals with some major EU issues:

- That of the ageing of the population and the shortage of qualified staff to take care of dependent persons (see i.e. the Green Paper on European Health Workforce): the European Commission estimated that by 2020 there would be a Europe-shortage of 600,000 nurses, mainly due to a doubling of the ageing problem. Mobility of workers is of course a mean to face this shortage but it raises problems in acknowledgment of qualifications as well as in the assurance of the quality of the tasks performed as well as in the risk of brain drain in sending countries.

IQEA contributes to this issue supporting a “good quality” of mobility for care workers, assuring the quality of the training they received, making the acknowledgment of their skills in other countries easier but also allowing persons trained abroad to return to their home country and be inserted in the local job market.

- That of comparability between VET systems across Europe and cooperation among VET Agencies (see Copenhagen Process for 2011-2020): the EU calls for: flexibility in VET systems, based on learning outcomes and validation of informal learning; a transparent qualification system and increased opportunities for transnational mobility of VET students.

IQEA contributes to this issue since it tries to implement an ECVET system on the basis of shared learning outcomes and including skills acknowledge through validation of informal learning.

