

Care Talents - in brief

The project "Care Talents" is a multilateral international project that aims, on the basis of the French experience in the field of validation of competences, acquired as a result of professional experience and in particular the system VAE (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience), to develop and experiment a model and tools for validation of competences for the profession of home assistant („badante"), adapted to the context of Italy. Within the project an analysis has been elaborated on the possibilities for transfer and adaptation of the developed products in the social, political and legislative context in Bulgaria.

The project "Care Talents" has been implemented within the programme "Lifelong Learning", sectoral programme "Leonardo da Vinci" for a period of two years (2007 - 2009) by four partner organizations from Italy, France and Bulgaria. More information about the project is available in Italian, English and Bulgarian language on the website: www.caretalents.it

Products, developed in the frame of the project "Care Talents"

- Analysis on the professional profile and procedures for validation of competences, acquired as a result of professional experience, according to the VAE system (Validation des Acquis de l'Expérience) for the professions "in-home caregiver" and "auxiliary nurse" in France. The analysis is available in Bulgarian language.
- Analysis of the political and legislative context connected to the introduction of a system for validation of competences in Italy and in particular for the professions in the social sector. The analysis is available in Bulgarian language.
- A Model and tools for validation of competences, acquired as a result of the professional experience, as a home assistant ("badante"), based on specifically developed methodology and professional profile for the context of Italy. The documents are available in Bulgarian.
- Analysis on the possibilities for implementation in Bulgaria of the model for validation of competences, acquired as a result of professional experience in the social sector, developed in Italy in the frames of the project "Care Talents".
- In the frame of the project open seminars were organized in Italy and Bulgaria, presenting the results of the project.

Main conclusions from the analysis for Bulgaria

Within the project "Care Talents" was elaborated a detailed analysis of the current political, legal and socio-cultural conditions in Bulgaria in the context of the common European tendencies, in order to identify the necessary steps for successful transfer in the national context of the model and tools for validation of competencies, developed in Italy, applied for professions in the social sector.

In Bulgaria the process of developing and implementing a system for validation of competences acquired as a result of non-formal or informal learning is related to the adoption of the National Strategy for Continuing Vocational Education and Training for the period 2005 - 2010, the Employment Strategy of Bulgaria for the period 2004 - 2010 and its update for the period 2008 - 2015 and the National Strategy for Lifelong Learning for the period 2008 - 2013. These policy documents highlight the need and importance of developing and implementing a system for validation of competences acquired outside the sphere of the formal education and training. Under current regulations, the main text concerning the possibilities for validation of competences acquired as a result of professional experience is included in the Vocational Education and Training Act (VETA). VETA provides that except the specialized institutions for vocational education and training within the system of vocational education and training, training for acquiring professional qualifications can be organized also by ministries, municipalities, universities, employers' organizations, organizations of employees and individual employers. It is provided also that training for acquiring professional qualifications can be realized through informal learning. The text of VETA however contains significant restrictions as regard the possibilities for validation of competences acquired through non-formal or informal learning/training by introducing a requirement for at least six months work experience on a labour contract in the related profession or practical training with a duration, determined by the educating/training institution.

At the same time, in Bulgaria, according to the current legislation, certificates for the recognition of professional qualifications can be issued only for professions, for which State educational requirements have been adopted. The State educational requirements are connected with the acquisition of professional qualification and are adopted through instructions of the Minister of Education and Science, in coordination with relevant ministries and other public departments. They are adopted as regards professions, included in the List of Professions for Vocational Education and Training, approved by the Minister of Education and Science. This List is elaborated by the National Agency for Vocational Education and Training (NAVET) and it classifies the professions and specialisations according to the professional directions by level of education and level of qualification.

The Bulgarian transferability report analyses the political and legal regulations in Bulgaria in the social sector. The main institution defining the policy in this area is the Ministry of Labor and Social Policy, which is supported by the Social Assistance Agency. Since 2003, a legislative reform adopted a new approach in the policy of the state social assistance, characterized by the so-called decentralization or introduction of shared responsibility between the government, social partners and citizens in this area. As a result, it is created a new authority with consulting competences - the Council for Social Assistance, including representatives of ministries, local authorities, business community and NGO sector.

The social services in Bulgaria are part of the social assistance system, aimed to facilitate and increase opportunities for individuals at risk to lead an independent life and to promote their social inclusion. The social services are divided into two main groups: social services, received in the community and social services provided in specialized institutions. The so called social services, received in the community are services, provided in the family or environment, close to family. There are different types of services such as personal assistants, social assistant, home helper, home social patronage, day centre, a centre for social rehabilitation and integration, centre for family-type housing, a centre for temporary housing, crisis centre and others. Providers of social services may be the state, municipalities, individuals, registered in accordance with the requirements of the Commercial Code (the so-called traders) and legal entities, including NGOs. The new policy approach of the Bulgarian Social assistance policy placed among its priorities the provision of social services in the community as a way to achieve the goal of creating better conditions and opportunities for beneficiaries of these services to participate to the full extent in the social life.

The detailed analysis on the professions in Bulgaria defined three main professional profiles associated with the sector of providing care for the elderly people and people with disabilities, which are close in their characteristics to the Italian "badante" and French "auxiliaire de vie". These professions are personal assistants, social assistants and home helper. These professions are associated with the social sector and are close in their characteristic to the professions, used by the French and Italian partners for development of the model and tools for validation of competences. In the Bulgarian context they have their own specifics. The common feature is that they take place mainly within national projects. Since 2002 the provision of the service "Personal assistant" has been mainly realized within the National Programme "Assistants to People with Disabilities ". On the other hand, activities related to the provision of service "Social Assistant" are supported by the National programmes "Assistants to People with Disabilities" and "Social Services for Employment" as well as through the project "Social Services against New Employment" (SANE) initiated by the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy. Service "Home helper" is mainly provided within the National Programme "Social Services in Family Environment".

As a whole, the initiation of the above mentioned programmes and projects as well as the provision of the services "Personal assistant", "Social assistant" and "Home helper" is associated to a greater extent with the policy to provide employment for unemployed people and only on a second place - to offer qualified services in the social sector. Therefore there is a certain neglecting of the need for training of employees in this field. Within the project SANE a Methodology the provision of the service in the community "Social assistant" has been developed, which was approved by the Executive Director of Social Assistance Agency. The organization of trainings for social assistants and home helpers for providing quality services has been realized in accordance with the section "Development and Training" of this Methodology. However, the existing training courses are not based on the learning outcomes. They are developed on a thematic basis, provided mainly within projects. For the moment, there is no an established uniform system to ensure quality training for these services.

In 2009 is elaborated a draft for a State educational requirement for the profession "Social assistant", which is expected to be approved by the Minister of Education and Science. The draft for the state educational requirement determines: entry educational level, the profile of the profession,

the training aims, learning outcomes, requirements for the facilities and requirements toward learners and is in compliance with the common European requirements for the development of professional profiles. It should be noted that after its adoption the State educational requirement will be applicable to the acquisition of qualifications in a wide range of professions in the social sector, including personal assistants, social assistants and home helper.

Analyzing the EU policy in the field of Lifelong learning it must be noted the specific focus that EU puts on the role of non-formal and informal learning in the modern context as well as on providing opportunities for validation of competences acquired as a result of professional experience. Promoting mobility of citizens, as well as their social and civic involvement is directly related to the establishment of National Qualifications Frameworks, based on learning results, which have to be comparable in a common European reference framework – the European Qualification Framework.

The system for validation of competences acquired as a result of professional experience, introduced in France – V.A.E, represents a good practice. The V.A.E. system is based on professional profiles, developed in compliance with the principles of the European Qualification Framework and in particular defined with a view to required knowledge, skills and competences for each profession, as well as well defined procedures. It provides the opportunity to those who have acquired competences as a result of professional experience to receive official recognition for them. The model for validation of competences for the occupation “badante” and the related tools, developed within the project “Care Talents”, elaborates on the French experience related to the occupation “auxiliaire de vie”, which is transferred and localized in the Italian context. The main advantages of this product could be defined in the following aspects:

- **The product is completely in line with the guidelines, included in the common strategical framework of EU related to Lifelong learning.**

The model for validation of competences acquired as a result of professional experience and its related tools, developed in Italy, are in compliance with the EU guidelines and requirement, to which Bulgaria has acceded as a member of the EU.

- **Adaptation possibilities**

The product was developed in such a way that provides the possibility to be adapted to the legal and the socio-cultural context and Bulgaria and to be effectively used for similar professions from the social sector.

- **Low price of the provided education**

The model for validation of competences acquired as a result of professional experience and its related tools, developed within the project “Care Talents” does not required specific equipment and is not related with investing considerable financial resources.

- **Flexibility (time and space)**

The product provides flexibility related to the time and space for the validation procedures, which makes the model convenient for application in different environments.

- **The product has been developed on paper version and on-line**

The product has been developed in printed version and on-line, which contributes to its flexibility and efficiency with a view to the different needs and abilities of the final user.

The positive effect for Bulgaria from the adaptation and implementation of the model could be defined in the following directions:

- **Ensuring higher quality of the social sector services;**

- **Promoting mobility of the people who have acquired competences in the social sector;**
- **Providing possibility for professional recognition of people, who have worked as a personal assistant, social assistant and home helper.**

After its adaptation and localization in the Bulgarian context the product can be used both in the private and public social sector. With this aim it should be adapted to the Training methodology for social assistants, approved by the Executive director of the Social Assistance Agency and/or to the State Educational Requirement (Draft) for the profession social assistant that will be approved by the Minister of Education. In addition the product content should be adapted to the socio-cultural context in Bulgaria.

Open seminar

On September 18, 2009 in Sofia was held an open seminar on "Validation of competences in the social sector". The seminar was organized by the Bulgarian partner in the project Balkanplan Ltd. and it was attended by representatives of the partners of the project "Care Talents" - Interfor-Sia (France) and Anziani e Non Solo (Italy). Guests at the seminar were representatives of municipalities, companies and organizations from the private and public sectors working in the field of social care in Bulgaria.

The seminar was opened by Ms Denitza Topchiyska of Balkanplan Ltd., which made a brief presentation of the project "Care Talents". The meeting continued with the presentation of Ms Tsvetelina Tzvetanova of Inferior-Sia, who presented the French experience of the system for validation of competence (VAE). Her presentation consisted of a brief history of the system VAE, its functions, a detailed description of the procedure of validation, as well as the strengths and weaknesses of the entire system.

Ms. Licia Boccaletti, the project coordinator for "Anziani et non Solo", presented the Italian model for validation of competencies, developed within the project "Care Talents", and the products of the project ASPASIA. Ms. Denitza Topchiyska closed the meeting with a presentation, which presented the opportunities for transfer of the Italian model validation in Bulgaria. In the ensuing discussion the seminar guests shared their experience in the field of social services and care and highlighted some key problems, among them - poor payment, insufficient qualification of the social and personal assistants, temporary employment and lack of opportunities for validation of professional experience.

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