

SUMMARY of PROJECT

“Implementing Cards for the recognition of European professional qualifications - A multi-stakeholder approach to enhance mobility”

1. INTRODUCTION

The European Union has set out ambitious objectives regarding employability, lifelong learning and workers' mobility in order to adjust to the ever increasing changes in the labour market. Underlying this approach is the conviction that enhancing the social dimension of Europe is a necessary step on the way towards a knowledge-based society and economy.

In particular, worker mobility plays a crucial role for the future of the EU. In this framework, the present project focusses on the recognition of professional qualifications and education, conceived as primary objectives by the Commission, which has put them at the core of several initiatives and pieces of legislation (e.g. EURES, the Bologna process, the EQF and directive 2005/36/EC). In particular, under directive 2005/36 EC harmonised reference standards in these areas have been identified as key elements to remove some of the root causes of the low rates of mobile workers in Europe. For this purpose, one of the tools envisaged was the creation of European professional cards, along the lines of existing national cards for specific professions in some Member States.

However, although the recognition of professional qualifications was put at the forefront by the Commission, it has in reality taken a second seat in the European social dialogue, as post-Lisbon developments have shown. As a result, implementation of 2005/36 EC has been disappointing, with little follow-up in Member States.

It is *EUROCADRES*' conviction that directive 2005/36 EC suffers from a notable implementation gap, which calls for a deeper involvement of all stakeholders. Skills, knowledge and experiences acquired over time by an individual need to be valued and capitalised at best. For both employers and employees in Europe it has become increasingly important to harmonise the recognition of professional competences in today's continuously changing labour market. In this framework the involvement of *EUROCADRES* and its member organisations is crucial, as professional and managerial staff (P&MS) contributes vitally to the development of a knowledge-based society.

Moreover, because European citizens do not only learn within formal settings but also through non-formal channels of all sorts, setting out common principles for the identification and recognition of the non-formal dimension of learning is also necessary. Such a reasoning is well in line with the Commission's standpoint at the Copenhagen declaration of 2002, whereby it is necessary to *"develop a set of common principles regarding validation of non-formal and informal learning with the aim of ensuring greater compatibility between approaches in different countries and at different levels"*.

The European Council of the Liberal Professions (CEPLIS) will be the main partner involved in the project. It is the only inter-professional association representing the liberal professionals at the Community level and it is constantly engaged in initiatives linked to the European social dialogue.

EUROCADRES and CEPLIS has already worked in the field of recognition of professional qualifications, with the aim to foster the implementation of directive 2005/36. Its latest contribution was the 2008/2009 project "Skills and competences for mobility in a competitive Europe", advocating for a valid methodology and reliable reference standards to describe and assess an individual's lifelong learning outcomes. The present project builds on the previous one by seeking to establish networks and agreements on the issuing of professional cards; it takes a step forward on this topic since it envisages to put forward concrete proposals and to re-launch the topic within the European social dialogue.

Defining, qualifying and harmonising qualifications and competences acquired by an individual over time is certainly a very challenging objective nowadays. Yet, achievements in this field would benefit all stakeholders involved; *employers* are seeking more and more for individuals with a diverse set of cross-competences in the present economic climate. On the other hand, *employees* face the need to capitalize their experiences within a shared reference system, for the good of their effective integration or re-integration into the job market. Lastly, *social partners* would also benefit from a higher consideration of the issue on the agenda, since they regard a harmonised system of recognition of professional qualifications as a key factor in encouraging the lifelong development of competences. In this context, the missing implementation of 2005/36 is a vanished opportunity for those who advocated for a greater intra-EU mobility.

Even the European Parliament perceives as necessary to engage in the field as soon as possible; in a recent report it stressed the added value of European professional cards and urged Member States to "strive for a more harmonised approach to the recognition of qualifications and competences, to simplify the administrative processes involved and to reduce the costs incurred by professionals".

The ultimate purpose of initiatives like ours is to create a comprehensive -and voluntary- European framework in order to encourage the transfer and acceptance of qualifications across different countries. Professional Cards are in our view one of the most suitable means to serve this purpose, despite the existence of national pressures opposing them and rejecting labour mobility as such. In line with Delor's four-fold approach to learning, the development of such Cards could contribute to eradicate one of the root causes for low worker mobility in Europe, and help project it into a more harmonised and boarder-free labour market.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE PROJECT

The project "Skills and competences for mobility in a competitive Europe" had identified a set of issues in need for a deeper consideration within the European social dialogue. In this wider context, the current project narrows down the previous one by stressing the importance of Professional Cards, in order to take a step forward from the previous initiative and to build a shared political will around their issuing. In the final report of the previous project, *EUROCADRES* stated its intention to return with a new proposal to create a "Professional Card" for Europe since it believes that this could be an effective tool for reaching a higher level of mobility through recognition of professional qualifications.

More specifically, *EUROCADRES* and *CEPLIS* intend to carry out activities related to the implementation of an important yet unimplemented directive. By looking at national practices on the use of professional cards for instance, it will be taken a step forward towards the future issuing of such tools. Within the project, agreements on the issuing of professional cards will be discussed with professional organisations, keeping the focus on their importance for P&MS. In particular, it will be investigated how the issuing of such a tool would help to value all competences acquired by a professional over time, and how it would strengthen them *vis à vis* prospective employers.

In this way, the project intends to prompt a new and harmonised approach to the concept of professional qualifications, which takes into account formal education, certificates, diplomas, on-the-job training and vocational training. Formal and non-formal learning have a complementary character in today's continuously-changing labour market; skills and knowledge acquired outside the formal learning process have become increasingly important for both employers and employees broadening and deepening the concept of professional competences. The topic is tightly linked with the recent orientation of the Commission set out in the working document "*New skills for new jobs in Europe*".