

TRACK FEASIBILITY STUDY: EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

HEIDEMARIE MÜLLER-RIEDLHUBER, PETRA ZIEGLER



Foto: Hannah Maria Müller

VIENNA, JULY 2017

The **main purpose** of the study was to clarify for all partner countries (Austria, France, Germany, Spain), which rollout perspectives exist for the TRACK blended learning offer (combining online and face-to-face sessions) and how the training can be promoted and be made available best for the target group. It was also analysed how informal caregivers can take advantage of the TRACK blended learning and certification offer in the context of further vocational education and training or the validation of non-formally and informally acquired competences and with regard to career perspectives in professional care.

Introduction to the TRACK training and certification offer

The TRACK blended learning offer aims to support informal caregivers in their care activities and their daily life with dementia patients. It is provided in 4 European language versions (English, French, German, Spanish) and will be available free of charge at the TRACK website hosted by Eurocarers (<http://eurocarers.org/track/index>) and via a Moodle platform hosted by IPERIA. Training providers which use Moodle platforms will be able to implement the TRACK training and certification programme free of charge in their learning environments.

The TRACK blended learning combines 16 hours of face-to-face sessions with 4 hours e-learning. The e-learning follows a modular structure and a micro-learning approach which takes into account informal caregivers' time constraints. Self-evaluation activities at the end of each learning module summarize the learning outcomes that have been achieved so far and raise awareness for skills and competences that have been acquired. Mentoring between informal caregivers and care professionals plays an important role in the overall concept of the TRACK blended learning offer, since informal caregivers are in need of personal contact and professional advice.

Informal caregivers who have passed the TRACK training receive a certificate that is based on a summary of the learning outcomes which have been acquired during the TRACK training. On one hand the certificate and the summary of learning outcomes underline the relevance of the skills and competences in the field of care for dementia patients informal caregivers have acquired, on the other hand, they offer the possibility to be transferred to professional skills audit tools at national level (e.g. ProfilPASS in Germany, bilan de compétences in France, dossier de competencias in Spain) or to be used in the context of recognition of prior learning (further education and training offers in the field of care). In some countries such as France or Spain, where validation procedures for the formal recognition of non-formal and informal learning exist, the TRACK training and certification offer might raise the informal caregivers' interest in having their long-term care experience validated and recognised.

Overall, the TRACK blended learning and certification offer

- Provides concrete information and support for informal caregivers with regard to daily challenges in the care of dementia patients

- helps to assure the quality of informal care of dementia patients and self-care of informal caregivers
- increases the self-confidence of informal caregivers and the awareness for skills and competences acquired in the field of care
- emphasises the value of informal care and unpaid care services provided by informal caregivers for their family members or close persons at personal and at social level
- might arouse informal caregivers' interest in further vocational education and training or in becoming a professional caregiver after the period of long term informal caregiving
- might offer new professional perspectives in the context of (re)entering the labour market

Objectives and content of the Feasibility Study

Based on these considerations, the study aims to draft a roadmap for the rollout of the TRACK training and certificate in each of the partner countries and to show pathways to further vocational education and training, to existing skills audit and validation procedures and to care professions that might offer the most appropriate “entry point” for informal carers into the labour market. The national validation systems and certification approaches represent the background for drafting the roadmap for the TRACK certification rollout and for defining care professions that can serve as a possible entry points into the labour market. Since social and health care professions are regulated professions requiring by law a specific qualification in many EU member states, informal carers who are interested in working in the field of care can either decide to enter the labour market “directly” and work in a low-qualified and low-paid non-regulated care assistant job that does not require any specific qualification or they can take advantage of vocational education and training offers for qualified care professions. The TRACK training offers small e-learning units tailored to the requirements of the informal caregivers and of users that are less familiar with internet and e-learning (using short information units, lots of visualisation and spoken text). Thus, the TRACK training might raise the motivation to learn and arouse informal carers' interest in further (vocational) training. The certification of the skills acquired by passing the TRACK training aims to improve the quality of informal care and to recognise the value of informal care services. Furthermore, the TRACK certificate offers the possibility that the acquired skills and competences are recognised in the context of already existing vocational education and training offers as prior learning. Information on possible further vocational training pathways for informal caregivers will be made available on the TRACK website by providing links to training providers that offer further vocational training and recognise the TRACK certificate.

In several European countries, such as France and Spain, everybody can (under certain conditions) apply for the validation and recognition of his/her work experience (including volunteer work) and acquire a corresponding professional qualification. These validation procedures provide, especially for people with no or little formal qualification, a good opportunity to acquire a qualification that is in line with their practical work experience. In the context of the validation of non-formal and informal learning the TRACK certificate

could be used to document part of the proof required in the validation procedure for a specific care profession. The TRACK certification roadmap refers to care professions that offer a good entry point into the labour market for informal caregivers of dementia patients. Thus, informal caregivers could decide to either participate in further vocational training for these care professions and apply for the recognition of prior learning in TRACK, or to apply for the validation of their professional experience, if they fulfil the conditions for the validation procedure and use the TRACK certificate for documenting part of the skills they acquired in the field of care of dementia patients.

Methodology

Information has been collected through desk research, literature review and study of good practices, from discussions and exchange with project partners, experts and stakeholders. In particular, interviews have been made with 8 national and 2 international validation and certification experts and feedback has been collected during 3 validation workshops from 61 experts (informal caregivers and care professionals, vocational education and training providers, policy and decision makers, representatives of placement services and care institutions etc.).

Based on the above-mentioned objectives and application scenarios of the TRACK training and certificate, the TRACK feasibility study offers

- Background information on informal care
- Information on possibilities to recognise skills and competences that have been acquired non-formally (via the TRACK training) or informally (via work experience) by informal caregivers
- Information on the policy background for validation and the recognition of skills at European level and in the piloting countries
- An overview of European initiatives supporting the comparability and transferability of skills and competences
- Information on validation procedures and standards, existing skills audit tools, institutional frameworks, main actors, financing, information and guidance as well as quality assurance procedures in the piloting countries
- Good practice examples for validation and the recognition of skills at European, national and regional level
- Recommendations for the implementation of TRACK at European level and in the piloting countries
- A roadmap for the rollout of the TRACK blended learning and certification offer
- Information on vocational education and career perspectives for informal carers (based on the comparison of competence profiles of care professions at national level and from ESCO)

Although the scope of the TRACK project is limited, the project aimed to explore a series of issues and to gain knowledge about the most appropriate further steps in supporting informal carers and the recognition of their competences.

Different scenarios for using TRACK

The following scenarios for using the TRACK certificate can be roughly differentiated:

- **Option 1:** caregiver receives a certificate for passing the TRACK training; in addition, he/she has the possibility to document all acquired care competences based on an overview of the achieved TRACK learning outcomes by using a national skills audit tool (links to some of these tools are offered at the TRACK website).
- **Option 2:** caregiver goes for further training: a) by doing a follow-up training for informal caregivers; he/she collects several certificates that can – under certain conditions – be recognised in validation procedures (especially in France and Spain) or by other education providers; b) by participating in a vocational training for a specific care profession.
- **Option 3:** caregiver uses the TRACK certificate to apply for recognition of prior learning at education and training providers who are TRACK partners and/or offer training for relevant care professions (some training offers for specific care professions that provide a good “entry point” into the labour market for informal caregivers show overlaps with the TRACK training, therefore, the TRACK training could be recognised as prior learning).
- **Option 4:** caregivers with long-term care experience may – under certain conditions – apply for official validation of his/her professional competences (especially in France and Spain), In this context the TRACK training could be seen as a kind of preparation training for a corresponding full qualification such as the *assistant(e) de vie (ADVD)* in France; the TRACK certificate could eventually also be used to document part of the acquired competences in caring for dementia patients; in order to refer informal carers to the possibility of having their skills formally recognised, the TRACK website will provide links to national information and guidance portals for validation.

Possibilities for rolling out the TRACK training in pilot countries

When starting a rollout of the TRACK training programme in the partner countries, it must be considered that some countries are more centralised, e.g. France, while in others, such as Spain or Germany, regions and municipalities are responsible for services in the care sector.

France is very centralised and the committee being the responsible awarding body only meets twice a year. The implementation of a new qualification can therefore get delayed by bureaucracy and can take a long time. Due to the small scope of the TRACK training (20 hours overall) it is not possible to position the resulting certificate as a full qualification. In the expert workshop, it was however stated that the TRACK training and certificate could be a starting point for further training for informal caregivers and could eventually be recognised as a kind of *preparation training for a full qualification* such as the *assistant(e) de vie (ADVD)*.

In **Spain**, the regions are responsible and launch calls for validating non-formally and informally acquired skills and competences for professional qualifications that are in high demand in their area. If skills and competences are validated for professional qualifications, they are valid all over Spain, not just in the respective region. Special calls can also be launched in the regions, which then result in a regional certificate that is only valid in the specific region; special calls can be launched if both employer and employee organisations support such a call. TRACK could possibly initiate a special call in Andalusia, since the Deputation of Jaén belongs to the project partnership and could possibly help in finding the necessary cooperation partners for such a call (trade unions and two big companies). Such a special call leading to a regionally recognised certificate might offer a first step for the rollout of TRACK at regional level and for linking the TRACK certificate to the national validation procedure of Spain and to further education and training offers at regional and national level.

In **Germany**, it is recommended to implement the TRACK training at regional and national level: The German validation workshop showed that the regional Public Employment Service and the AWO (Workers' Welfare Organisation) in Halle are potential cooperation partners with an interest in implementing the TRACK training. A cooperation with these institutions at regional level could possibly lead to a broader rollout at federal or national level. During the workshop the cooperation with self-help groups, family doctors and "mobile" nurses, who normally are in direct contact with concerned persons and know their situation very well, was also mentioned as a promising way to promote and roll out the TRACK training. In addition, the TRACK training and certificate could be promoted at national level by convincing the Ministry of Health and/or the public social security system to support informal carers of dementia patients and the quality of informal dementia care by funding blended learning offers such as TRACK for all informal carers.

In all partner countries exist skills audit tools that are of different relevance for the public. In France and Spain, these audit tools are more important for competence documentation than for example in Germany and Austria where these tools are either not so well-known (Austria) or compete with similar tools and are often limited to specific regions (Germany). However, in the expert workshops these tools were regarded as the most appropriate first step for the documentation of acquired skills and competences and a low threshold approach for becoming aware of one's professional competence profile. Therefore, it is recommended to either envisage a direct cooperation with institutions that are issuing these audit tools (*bilan de compétences* in France, *dossier de competencias* in Spain or the *ProfilPASS* in Germany) or to inform informal caregivers of the existence of such tools and how the TRACK competences can fit into these. In Spain, where the *dossier de competencias* is a central element of the validation process, the completion of the TRACK training programme could be connected to the *dossier de competencias* as an indirect evidence of non-formal training enabling the acquisition of the skills to be evaluated. The skills dossier is a portfolio including a self-introduction, a CV, information about professional experience and training completed so far and a self-assessment.

Challenges in promoting and recognising the TRACK training

The following main challenges for promoting TRACK in the target group of informal caregivers exist:

- Lack of self-understanding as an informal caregiver
- Lack of awareness for the importance of training in the field of care for dementia patients
- Time constraints of informal caregivers of dementia patients
- Difficulties in using internet and e-learning applications
- Reservations with regard to learning (bad experience with learning, missing motivation)
- Informal caregivers of dementia patients are difficult to address, because they are seldom organised in networks, associations, self-help groups etc.

The TRACK project aims to overcome these challenges by offering a user-friendly blended learning that is tailored to the needs of the target group (innovative micro-learning, mentoring, overview of acquired skills etc.). TRACK also intends to improve the self-understanding and self-confidence of informal caregivers by offering a training that helps them in their daily life, improves their care skills and offers further perspectives for future vocational training and career in the field of care.

The following main challenges for achieving recognition of the TRACK training and certificate at national level exist:

- There exist only limited training offers for informal caregivers in some piloting countries and they are not regarded as an attractive target group for (vocational) education and training
- Some stakeholders, for example in Germany, are quite suspicious regarding the idea of offering informal caregivers the possibility to acquire a formal qualification in the field of care without passing the foreseen education and training pathway
- General reluctance of national education and training providers as well as companies in the field of care to implement and recognise training programmes and certificates of “foreign” providers
- The small scope of the TRACK training (overall 20 hours) corresponds to the need of informal caregivers and their limited time resources, but it does not suffice to position the TRACK certificate as a full qualification in the national education and training systems
- Comprehensive validation and recognition procedures are not available in all piloting countries: while in France and Spain validation procedures for experience-based and non-formal learning exist, but are often linked to complex and demanding procedures, validation procedures for non-formally and informally acquired competences are still under development in Germany and Austria and are not available so far for health and social care professions.
- There exist different competence profiles for care professions that deal with the care of dementia patients at national level; Most of the health and social care professions are regulated by national law, which means that the content of vocational education and training for these

professions is also defined by law; in order to be recognised the TRACK training and certification has to fit with these regulated training offers

- Existing European transparency tools so far do not offer a good basis for comparison of the competence and qualification profiles of relevant care professions for informal caregivers

Despite the mentioned challenges there exist several possibilities to roll out the TRACK training and support recognition at national level.

Short term perspectives

The TRACK training will be offered free of charge in formats that are commonly used for distance learning (moodle; web export interface) to every organisation interested in implementing it. Thus, education and training providers and other institutions will be able to receive and implement the distance learning lessons in four language versions (English, German, French and Spanish) and will only have to “invest” the organisational and technical infrastructure and staff that is needed for training support and mentoring. Furthermore, the training platform will be available also after the end of the project for everybody interested in using it and having internet access and a personal computer.

By offering the TRACK training in this way, the distribution, use and recognition of the TRACK training by national VET providers, caregiver associations, self-help groups, public institutions and so on will be stimulated.

Empowerment and concrete support of informal caregivers for dementia patients in everyday life is one of the main aims of the TRACK training. In addition, informal carers will be supported by making the competences they acquired visible: The skills and competences acquired by passing the TRACK training are described as learning outcomes and can be easily compared with learning outcomes of other care professions. The feasibility study collected information on national care professions that could be good entry points into the labour market for informal caregivers and compared the learning outcomes of vocational trainings for these professions with the learning outcomes of TRACK. The care professions that can be considered as most appropriate for the labour market entry of informal caregivers of dementia patients are *Assistant/e de vie* in France, *Alltagsbetreuer/in für Demenzerkrankte nach § 87b Abs. 3 SGB XI* in Germany and *Atención socio sanitaria a personas en el domicilio* and *Atención socio sanitaria a personas dependientes en instituciones sociales* in Spain. Overlaps between the learning outcomes of the TRACK programme and the learning outcomes of these care professions and the most relevant care profession profile in ESCO (European taxonomy of Skills, Competences, qualifications and Occupations) will be made transparent for informal caregivers. Furthermore, TRACK will offer information on skills audit tools at national level that can be used to document one’s professional experience and will provide links to information on existing validation procedures.

Long term perspectives

In a long-term perspective connecting the TRACK training programme (and possible follow-up programmes for dementia care) to an NQF and therefore linking it to the EQF would be an important step. A future perspective could also be to create a more comprehensive international training programme for informal carers that covers, besides the core competences of the identified relevant care occupations in each piloting country, specific skills and competences for the care of dementia patients. The creation of such an international training programme could eventually be used to start partnerships with (other) big training providers. In this context, ESCO and the input of professional care organisations could be used to define a competence profile of informal carers (minimum requirements for a good quality of informal care) at European level. Furthermore, existing occupation descriptions of ESCO could be refined in a way that national care qualifications such as *assistant(e) de vie*, *Atención socio sanitaria a personas en el domicilio*, *Alltagsbetreuer/in für Demenzerkrankte nach § 87b Abs.3 SGB XI* could be linked to this profile. The TRACK competences would partly overlap with all mentioned competence profiles.

If the TRACK training programme and certificate is further developed into the direction of an international qualification for (informal) carers, it will be worth thinking about a collaboration with the trade unions and Eurocadres, who defined the so-called professional card (at present available for a few professions only, among those general care nurses and physiotherapists), and to discuss options for developing a professional card for (informal) caregivers for the elderly.

The best option to implement the TRACK training and certificate at national level seems to be this link to already existing training and education offers in the field of care for dementia patients. In general, existing qualifications or professional standards and related further training and education programmes offer the possibility to recognise the TRACK training as a kind of preparation training. As mentioned in one of the expert workshop the TRACK training could also be linked as a specialisation module or “add-on” to existing programmes e.g. for paramedics and similar professional groups dealing with dementia patients.

Another option for the rollout of the TRACK programme at European level could be to link TRACK to already existing European qualification offers, such as the European Care Certificate (ECC), where TRACK could play the role of an entry training based on which carers could – if they like – move on to the ECC in a next step. In case this cooperation is considered, it has to be clarified to what degree overlaps between the ECC and the TRACK competences exist and if the assessment approach of TRACK and the ECC are “compatible”.

Conclusion

The TRACK project will help to

- Improve the quality of informal care by offering specific training for informal caregivers of dementia patients

- Support informal caregivers in their need for information and in their daily care routine by offering a training that is easy to use and to access and meets the requirements of the target group (blended learning approach, small learning units), hence contribute to releasing the stress and anxiety affecting some of them, and improving their quality of life
- Raise awareness about informal caregivers' contribution to care and about the competences they have acquired in this context by offering a certified training
- Document competences and skills acquired by informal carers (e.g. during the TRACK training by integrating an overview of the passed learning outcomes in the training)
- Raise informal carers' interest for (lifelong) learning by offering a training tailored to their needs
- Develop further education and career perspectives for informal caregivers by demonstrating existing overlaps between the TRACK competences and the competence profiles of certain care professions and related vocational education and training
- Offer new vocational training and career perspectives for informal carers by collaborating with providers who offer comprehensive trainings for informal carers and are willing to recognise the competences acquired during the TRACK training
- Raise self-confidence and self-awareness of informal caregivers by supporting a transfer of acquired TRACK competences to existing skills audit tools

It must be mentioned that the validation and recognition of non-formal education in the field of care is – despite many initiatives for more transferability and comparability at EU level – still extremely difficult. Some member states still need to catch up with the implementation of the EC recommendations for validation and with the development of clear rules and procedures for the recognition of prior learning.

Furthermore, the need for training and the recognition of informal carers' skills should be paid more attention in order to ensure the quality of home care and the future contribution of informal carers to the health and social system. EU funding schemes will play an important role in this context as they could support projects that trigger comparison of national conditions and developments. Structural funds should be dedicated to the training and recognition of informal carers' skills and competences and the systematic information exchange between informal caregivers and care professionals.

Co-operation in a large partnership that aims at the recognition and validation of (informal) carers' skills for dementia patients could help to bundle forces and to reach more effectiveness at European level. Such a partnership should include care professionals, informal caregivers, companies, VET providers, policy and decision makers, Trade Unions and other important stakeholders.