**A European Qualification Framework for Caregivers**

**Towards the development of professional standards for care workers in Europe**

The HelpCare project aims to build upon the knowledge and the evidence that were produced in the course of the project, which included an in depth research with more than 550 care givers and a series of round table discussion with policy-makers and stakeholders that work for the improvement of social care in 5 European Union countries. Our major finding was that ensuring adequate quality care means it should be provided in professional standards (i.e., *professionalization of care*), regardless of its nature of delivery: formal or informal. In this direction, we have produced two reports; the Barriers for the Professionalization of Care in Europe report, which identifies the most significant obstacles towards ensuring high quality care for European Citizens, and the Best Practice of Care in Europe report <http://helpcare-project.org/reports/>, which lists good examples of practise in the UK, Italy Poland, Bulgaria and Greece.

The HelpCare project team aims to provide useful suggestions to various stakeholders and public actors that regulate the landscape of long-term care in the EU. The absence of a European Qualification Framework for Caregivers (EQFC) was identified as a significant obstacle towards *the professionalization of care,* as stated in the Barriers for the Professionalization of Care in Europe report. In 2012, a document called the *European Quality Framework for long-term care services*was official launched in an event that was organised at the European Parliament in Brussels, and hosted by Heinz K. Becker, MEP and co-chair of the Intergroup on Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity. The document was the result of the two-year WeDO project, coordinated by AGE Platform Europe with the help of 18 partner organisations within Europe [http://wedo.tttp.eu/european-quality-framework-long-term-care-services](http://wedo.tttp.eu/european-quality-framework-long-term-care-servicesI)

In this document, it was argued that the implementation of this quality framework would require a strong partnership and participatory approach from all relevant stakeholders (policy makers, service providers, funders, researchers, older people’s organisations, informal carers, volunteers, industry, trade unions, etc.), in order to ensure the delivery of quality long-term care. A relevant quality framework however was never implemented at a European level, and was not translated in a legislative framework that regulates the care giving market in Europe, by imposing a set of minimum qualifications for formal and informal caregivers as a prerequisite to assume a care giving role. The benefits of regulating long-term care are listed below, however, the lack of a regulatory framework for long-term care does not give the incentive to most caregivers, as well as to care commissioners, to proceed to educate or train themselves or their stuff. The strict economic model imposed in the long-term care market to date, both in the private and in the public sector, discourages further for investments that shape a predominately skilful labour force in long term care. In other words, long-term care does not seem to be efficiently self-regulated in order to shape a predominately skilful labour force, therefore, the establishment of an EQFC would promote a national dialogue for the formation of a political strategy in this direction.

Given the multiple benefits that can derive from the formation of a regulatory framework for long term care, and aspired by the principles described from the Wed partnership in the European *Quality Framework for long-term care,* the HelpCare project team has a set of proposals for the formation of an EQFC. The central axon of these proposals is based on the findings of our work, which point clearly to the added value that a framework that encourages *education and training* in caregiving could bring in shaping a body of skilful and efficient care workers*.* We propose that the formation of an EQFC should follow the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), a translation device that allows national qualifications to become more readable across Europe, promoting care workers' and learners' mobility between countries and facilitating their continuous development and training. The EQFC could assist the alignment of different countries' national qualifications systems to a common European reference framework for the education and training of long-term care workers, and may give the potential for care workers to understand better their qualifications levels, giving them the incentive for further training to acquire a competitive advantage in the labour marker using a European standardization system as a reference point.

**1. Introducing standards**

1.1 The acknowledgement of care giving as a demanding role that has to be delivered in professional standards lies in the centre of the EQFC. The development of the corresponding standards are set to ensure that long-term care is delivered in good quality and in a form that can be realistically available and accessible from all European citizens, no matter the nature of delivery: informal or formal.

1.2 Improving the skills of the existing formal and informal long-term care workforce is the key that enables the EQFC to map care giving skills, knowledge, and competences across Levels of Qualification and Caregiving Titles. This approach will lead to more predictable outcomes for care recipients (i.e., ensuring the adequate quality of care is delivered based on demand), as well as to notable benefits for care providers (i.e., clear paths for career development as care workers).

1.3 To undertake the role of a long-term caregiver, we propose it should be necessary to have acquired at least the Entry Level Qualification as a caregiver (Level 1 or Level 2). A long-term care giver obtaining higher Levels of Qualification can assume duties that correspond to caregiver from a lower Levels of Qualification; the reverse however should not be possible. That signifies that a higher Level of Qualification corresponds to an added set of skills that allow caregivers to assume more roles and responsibilities in care giving, ensuring the quality of long term care delivery.

1.4 The standards and the qualifications should be based on needs and demands that emerge in long-term care, and not be driven by the availability of existing (non-care specific) qualifications or supply of staff. Therefore, the standards should apply equally to formal and informal caregivers. The relevance and the importance of the standards do not depend on the type or nature of delivery (i.e., from a relative or a third person), nor whether compensation for the services is foreseen (i.e., professional services or voluntary based), nor on the legal status of the caregiver (i.e., formal worker or informal worker). The identification of care needs will be driving certain care plan with certain care responsibilities, which can be assumed only from those that are sufficiently qualified, as described by the description of their Caregiving Titles, and by applying the rules described in the paragraph 1.3 of this document.

**2. The standards of Qualification for Care Workers**

2.1 ***Registered Entry Level Caregiver*** – Level 1, 2, and 3 in the EQF (UK readers please note that levels in the EQF do not equate exactly to UK levels. UK level 2 (GCSE level) matches EQF level 3)

**Competency**: A carer with this Caregiving Title can be either a registered professional or informal caregiver that assumes care giving responsibilities. A Registered Entry Level Caregiver can offer regular and ongoing assistance to someone with a chronic illness, disability or other long lasting care needs, inside or outside a professional or formal employment framework (i.e., unpaid). These duties can be assumed only under the guidance and supervision of the care recipient, a legal guardian, a social worker, or at least a Registered Senior Carer, assisting in instrumental activities of daily living (iADL), such as: shopping, cleaning the house or any other domestic activities, paying bills, mediating affairs with services, cooking and meal preparation, mailing, socializing and leisure activities, attending appointments, administration and paperwork, assisting with pets and gardening, supporting the person while at work, helping to look after children, going on holiday or gaining education.

**Pre-requisites**: A Level 1,2, or 3 General Secondary Education qualification (in the UK level 3 equates to GCSE) , for the following skills

* Language proficiency
* Numerical, digital and IT skills
* Communication skills suitable for working with care recipients, families, care workers and health professionals
* Knowledge that leads in recognising signs of harm, abuse and neglect, including recognising situations which require immediate action, and know how to respond appropriately.
* Knowledge and ability to follow a safety protocol in case of emergency or sudden illness
* An understanding of the limits of the role of a caregiver who is at entry level , including knowledge and ability to seek advice or refer to another professional.

2.2 ***Registered Care Assistant*** – Level 3,4, and 5 in the EQF

**Competency**: Registered Care Assistants can be either registered professionals or informal caregivers that attend a training program to become Registered Care Assistants or any other Caregiving Title. Registered Care Assistants work with all types of people who need care and support and who receive direct care. They should operate only as part of a larger team and should be supervised by at least a registered Senior Carer. Their work is defined by a care plan to meet the assessed needs of the person requiring care or support. Their duties can vary depending on the needs of the individual, including: feeding, mobility, toileting, bed making, washing, dressing, grooming, monitoring individuals’ conditions by taking temperature, pulse, respiration and weight, contributing to record keeping, administer medication. Registered Care Assistants can be responsible for the individuals' overall comfort and well-being and help people who need care. Under supervision by a registered Senior Carer, a registered Case Assistant can assume care giving responsibilities in domestic care. A registered Care Assistant needs to acquire the Fitness to Practise certification.\*

**Pre-requisites:** a Level 3, 4, or 5 qualification, under the condition that derives from institutions that provide specialized training in nursing or care giving. A registered Care Assistant can assume care giving responsibilities while in training that leads to the certification of all the skills described for registered Entry level Care Workers, with the addition of:

* Basic nursing skills
* Using medical IT and basic medical devices
* Basic knowledge of counseling techniques, including active listening
* Moving and handling skills
* First aid
* A good understanding of the basic human rights in care, the person-centred care approach, patients’ rights for social inclusion and privacy, as well as patients’ empowerment
* A good understanding of diversity and tolerance
* A good understanding of issues related to caregivers’ and patients’ emotional and physical safety and well being

2.3 ***Registered Senior Carer***– Level 6 in the EQF

**Competency**: Registered Senior Carers are allowed to work independently in domestic care (i.e. with in-house patients), and they can supervise and co-ordinate the work of all caregivers that hold a Caregiving Title at a lower level

**Pre-requisite:**

* Level 6 Bachelor or Diploma degree from a University or College
* Evidence of professional development through education and training in a specialized area, context of operation, or health condition

**Skills:**  Registered Senior Carers need to have all the skills described for Registered Care Assistants, in addition to:

* Knowledge of the rules and regulations of the local legislative context for care and employment in the health sector
* Health management skills, including knowledge about integrative care
* Resource management and supervising skills
* Developing, monitoring and revising a health care plan
* Advanced nursing skills
* Counselling skills
* Specialization in the area of operation

2.3 ***Registered Care Specialist*** – Level 6 and 7 in the EQF

**Competency**: Registered Care Specialist can supervise and co-ordinate the work of all caregivers that hold a Caregiving Title at any level (including their own), and can assume a leadership role within the structures of any health care settings. Registered Care Specialist can assume teaching and training responsibilities, as well as conduct and lead research activities.

**Pre-requisite:**

* A Level 6 degree from a Nursing University or College, in addition to evidence of specialization a specialized area of operation through a Level 7 Certificate or Diploma
* A Level 7 Master’s Degree from a Nursing University or College that provides evidence for specialization in a specific area, context of operation, or health condition

**Skills:** A Registered Care Specialist needs to have all the skills described for Registered Senior Carers, in addition to:

* Advanced health management skills
* Advanced Resource management and supervising skills
* Leadership skills
* Research skills

**\*** The fitness to practise certification is a process we recommend to be implemented and registered by various organisations, such as the Health and Care Professional Council in the UK (see fitness to practice for social care workers). The fitness to practice is granted formally by professional associations, academic institutions or authorized bodies. The fitness to practise certification does not refer directly to a set of trainable skills that are necessary to provide quality care. More specifically, it refers to the repeated occurrence of behaviors and values which may affect the level of competence and confidence of a carer when working in a professional capacity. This may include matters not directly related to professional practice, and cannot be shaped in a positive direction entirely through training and education.

The research findings of the HelpCare project indicate that an efficient caregiver has a specific set of characteristics, namely: empathy, emotional intelligence, a positive attitude, conscientiousness, patience, and a sincere interest and enthusiasm for the role of a caregiver. Therefore, we propose that a process should be implemented to ascertain a fitness to practise for those that would like to attain a professional status as care workers in long term care, where the candidates will be assessed for their suitability based on the aforementioned characteristics.

**3. Assessment against the standards and further development**

All caregivers should be assessed against the EQFC criteria outlined in the section above. The assessment process should be common for all candidates, regardless the type or nature of care delivery. The consistent and rigorous assessment will help to provide confidence to employers and care recipients, and maximise candidates’ opportunities to work across and between settings. The standards in their current form cannot be regarded as specific or explicit. It could however serve as the basis of discussion for the elaboration of more specific and explicit criteria for the assessment of long-term caregivers. The EQFC is a set of standards that appreciates knowledge, training, abilities and skills, as necessary components for the efficient delivery and organization of quality long term care. In this context, some professional judgements will be required for the efficient development of training programs in different setting, as well as for the accreditation of prior experience or fitness to practise schemas. All those assessments however should describe specific activities undertaken by long term caregivers, where candidates have demonstrated the set of skills that can ensure that the EQFC standards have been met. This way, the EQFC could assist in aligning different countries' national qualifications systems for long term care, giving the potential for a better access in quality care among European Citizens

The European Qualification Framework for Caregivers

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| EQF | EQFC  Caregiving Title |
| **1** | **Registered Entry Level Carer** |
| **2** | **Registered Entry Level Carer** |
| **3** | **Registered Entry Level Carer**  **Registered Care Assistant** |
| **4** | **Registered Care Assistant** |
| **5** | **Registered Senior Carer or Care Specialist** |
| **6** | **Registered Senior Carer or Care Specialist** |
| **7** | **Registered Senior Carer or Care Specialist** |

