

REPORT OF THE FIFTH MEETING OF THE NETWORK ON LONG-TERM CARE POLICIES IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN (REDCUIDAR+ NETWORK)

October 20, 2021

Labor competencies linked to quality care: training, evaluation, and certification

Care policies for people with care and support needs are a priority on the social agenda of Latin American, Caribbean, and European countries. This is a result of a growing demand and due to the need to respond to the structural weaknesses in the care sector revealed by the COVID-19 pandemic. The sector needs to be regulated and formalized, which implies both the training of care workers - so that they perform their tasks with increasingly higher quality - and the standardization and certification of competencies acquired within the professional practice. Therefore, the certification of competencies can have a positive impact not only on service providers who can improve their employability and diversify and expand their career profiles, but also on the quality of the services provided.

CUIDAR+ NETWORK

The Network on Long-Term Care Policies in Latin America and the Caribbean is an initiative promoted by the Inter-American Development Bank, the European Union's EUROsociAL+ Program and the French Development Agency.

The main objective of the Network is to promote and facilitate the exchange of knowledge and experiences as well as to strengthen opportunities for collaboration among policymakers responsible for the formulation of long-term care policies in LAC. As such, the Network will contribute to the development of institutional and technical capacity in member countries, promoting good practices in the implementation of long-term care systems.

Considering this, the RedCUIDAR+ has proposed in this V meeting a reflection on the care-related competencies and its three key aspects - training, evaluation, and certification, with special reference to the opportunities and challenges that these processes imply.

The discussion began with a general introduction on care-related competencies, followed by two Latin American experiences on competency qualification and certification.

The opening was led by **Ana Herrero Romeu**, Program Manager of the European Commission's Directorate General for International Partnerships, and **Ana Pérez Camporeale**, Coordinator of the Gender Equality Policies Area of the EUROsociAL+ Program, who stressed the importance of the RedCUIDAR+ Network as a space for dialogue and reciprocal support between the countries in the face of the common challenges that the two European and Latin American regions share in long-term care.

Anna Herrero recalled that long-term care is a priority in the European social agenda, being explicitly included in the EU Social Pillar. Ana Pérez recalled how the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the centrality of care; and how its approach must have a gender perspective, given the feminization of a sector characterized by the informality, unpaid or low wages, and lack of recognition; and whose transformation must be directed towards decent employment.

Next, **Gloria Arredondo**, Senior Technician of the EUROsociAL+ Social Policies area, provided a brief conceptual introduction to competency evaluation and certification systems.

These are usually structured around two main components: a process of identification/standardization of competencies linked to the set of knowledge, skills, abilities, and associated attitudes that ensure the appropriate quality of certain job functions (profiles); and a systematized process that allows the evaluation of a person's job performance based on these competencies leading to their certification. Certification may be the result of two different ways of acquiring competencies, which may complement each other: education, which may be technical-professional education and/or job training; and experience, acquired through professional practice (i.e., recognition of expertise or abilities).

Arredondo stressed that the certification processes contribute to the formalization, employability, and improvement of the working conditions of service providers, as well as to the professionalization of the sector and the assurance of care quality.

The first panelist, **Loreto Méndez Amunátegui**, Head of Institutional Relations and Communications of the Commission of the National System of Certification of Labor Competencies of Chile (*ChileValora*), reflected on the benefits of the qualification and certification of competencies, analyzing their link with the care sector in Chile.

ChileValora is a public service under the umbrella of the Ministry of Labor and Social Security and works with representatives of the productive sectors through tripartite bodies (employers, workers, and the public sector) called Sectoral Labor Competency Bodies (OSCL). ChileValora's process of evaluation and certification of labor competencies allows formally recognizing the knowledge, skills, and abilities of workers to perform specific functions in a job, regardless of how they were acquired. To this end, the Chilean institution standardizes competencies through the creation of a catalog of labor competencies that establishes the knowledge, skills, and aptitudes that a person must have to perform in different work situations, according to occupational profiles.

ChileValora has a registry of authorized evaluation and certification centers that are responsible for evaluating the labor competencies of people who request it and grant certifications according to the catalog of occupational profiles in force and in accordance with the procedures and methodologies validated by the client institution. A ChileValora certificate accredits the person as a professional and implies the recognition of experience. In addition, the articulation with technical training allows the recognition of such certification and its validation (with possible reduction of the load or duration of studies).

Chile currently has, in the care sector, some occupational profiles with a focus on residential care homes: primary¹ caregiver, hospice monitor and social-health assistant, residence director, psychosocial coordinator and direct care educator. Another occupational profile related to the care of people is that of home care worker, which includes the care of children and older people experiencing reduced functional ability, in terms of physical integrity, food and care.

To close her presentation, Méndez highlighted the feminization of the certification of caregivers, who represent 96% of the total number of caregivers.

¹ According to the terminology used in the classification in Chile.

The second panelist, **Claudia Maria Vargas Zuñiga**, a professional from the Labor Competency Evaluation and Certification Group of the National Learning Service (SENA) of Colombia, presented the experience in labor certification in the care sector in the country.

One of SENA's functions is the evaluation and certification of labor competencies, both for companies and workers. The evaluation of labor competencies involves a process through which evidence of a person's performance, product and knowledge is collected to determine his or her level of competence to perform a productive function, focusing on the person's actual performance based on a standard (labor competency standard) and/or certification scheme.

The certification of competencies in the care sector has limitations.

In general, the care sector in Colombia includes two types of care: health care, which may take place in hospitals or at home and is provided by nursing staff; and personal assistance, in institutions or at home. Within this framework, caregivers can be classified as family caregivers (provide assistance without receiving financial compensation, and their work as caregivers may limit or prevent them from participating in the job market), informal caregivers (they provide care without specific training and may or may not be paid) and formal caregivers or care workers (persons with a legal employment relationship with an institution or person, who are trained in caregiving).

The absence of a professional profile for caregivers means that formal care work is being assumed in practice almost exclusively by auxiliary nursing personnel. To overcome this, work is being done on a draft bill to formalize an occupational profile for care workers which will consequently allow an adequate and better positioning of the care sector in the social and productive spheres. Without the formalization of occupational profiles, neither evaluation nor training is possible.

SENA has 9 labor competency standards in the care sector and conducts training programs in care, although they remain very focused on health-related care work. Since 2018, although the number of people certified in these profiles has increased, reaching nearly two thousand people in 2020, the figure is clearly insufficient.

The two presentations were followed by a **group discussion**, which focused on several questions: "What measures should be accelerated to implement or improve and expand the certification of labor competencies in the different areas of caregiving in my country? What obstacles do we identify to progress in these processes? What role do care workers and the associations that represent them have in promoting these processes?"

From the group discussion, although with different nuances among the countries, several key issues emerged.

Among the main **obstacles/weaknesses** of competency certification in the field of caregiving, the following stand out:

- the existing gap between certifiable professional profiles (and the requirements for certification) and the low professionalization and high informality of the care sector - which implies, among other things, the non-standardization of competencies of some profiles in the care sector and the practical exclusion of certain groups from certification processes (women, migrant population, etc.);

- the inadequate articulation between the health and social protection sectors, which hinders the "universal" standardization of competencies and maintains sectorized certifications;
- the lack of public funding for certification processes, which limits access to them for the most vulnerable groups, due to their costs;
- the lack of diversification of the training and certification offer and its inadequate articulation.

In order to reverse these obstacles/weaknesses, several **measures** (always bearing in mind that the countries have different realities), such as:

- to transition from health care models to social-health care models in the definition of profiles;
- to advance in the formalization/professionalization of the profiles of the care sector, with the standardization of competencies;
- to improve the articulation between the actors that train and those that certify, as well as between the public and private sectors;
- increase/diversify the training offer and level the competencies;
- to promote the improvement of the training of caregivers;
- to increase the supply of certification centers;
- to seek incentives to certify caregivers and lower certification costs.

Regarding the associations representing care workers, there is consensus that they are key players in the construction of proposals for standardizing profiles in the care sector.

The conclusions and closing remarks were made by **Francesco Maria Chiodi**, coordinator of the Social Policies Area of the EUROsociAL+ Program, who underscored the existing consensus, despite the heterogeneity of situations in the different national care systems regarding the need to transform the sector and advance in the recognition, regulation, formalization and professionalization of care, essential steps to improve the quality of services and the working conditions of care workers. He recovered a central idea in the meeting that the certification of competencies can be an important milestone for the sector. Certification has positive impacts for care workers as it can improve their employability, employment status, career paths and self-esteem. In addition, it leads to the standardization of profiles, makes it possible to understand the gaps in competencies and improve them, all of which results in an improvement in the quality of services. Given the feminization of the care sector, it also has a unique impact on reducing gender gaps.

Finally, he raised the opportunity to conduct a study that would make it possible to assess the current situation in relation to issues such as the dimensioning of the demand for care, the mapping of registers of caregivers and care workers, the identification of professional profiles associated with the care sector, the existing standards of competence for certification (through experience), and the market reaction to people whose skills have been certified, among others.

In closing, he urged the participants to continue seeking answers to the questions raised during the following meetings.

Links to the presentations:

Spanish: <https://cursos.iadb.org/es/indes/quinta-reuni-n-de-la-redcuidar-las-competencias-vinculadas-los-cuidados-de-calidad-capacitaci>

English: <https://cursos.iadb.org/en/webinars/envejecimiento/fifth-meeting-redcuidar-competencies-linked-quality-care-training-assessment-and>

Portuguese: <https://vimeo.com/644456650>

References

EUROSociAL

- ❑ To learn more about professional competencies see the articles:
 - Francesco Maria Chiodi, EUROsociAL Social Policies Area: <https://eurosociAL.eu/bitacora/cuidados-y-certificacion-de-competencias-laborales/>
 - Gloria Arredondo: <https://eurosociAL.eu/biblioteca/doc/politicas-y-sistemas-en-america-latina-y-europa-de-competencias-profesionales-volumen-i/>
- ❑ More information on the labor formalization of long-term care can be found at these sites:
 - <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8106&furtherPubs=yes>
 - <https://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=738&langId=en&pubId=8396>
- ❑ To learn more about the actions developed by the European Union's EUROsociAL Program see: <https://eurosociAL.eu/>
 - Section dedicated to COVID-19: <https://eurosociAL.eu/covid-19/>
- ❑ EUROsociAL Magazine Reciprocally, social cohesion in Europe and Latin America: <https://eurosociAL.eu/blog-reciprocamente/>

IDB

- ❑ **Materials on aging and care for older people experiencing care and support needs in Latin America and the Caribbean:**
 - More materials on aging and care for people experiencing care and support needs can be accessed at this IDB site <https://www.iadb.org/es/panorama/panorama-de-envejecimiento>.
 - Special section with materials from the RedCuidar+: <https://www.iadb.org/es/panorama/redcuidar>

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