

EXAMS EVALUATION REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS

EQUALvet Development of a vocational training program for people with
intellectual disabilities in three professions:

cooking assistant, gardening assistant and cleaning assistant

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EQUALvet

The “**EXAMS EVALUATION REPORT & RECOMMENDATIONS**” is a result of the cooperation between the partners of the consortium of EQUALvet Erasmus+ Project. This report was published in November 2022.

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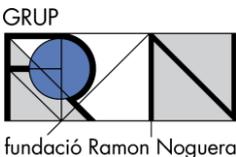
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1. CONSORTIUM

The consortium consists of the following partners:

Organization		Website / Email
 <p>Margarita VTC (Greece)</p>	<p>www.eeamargarita.gr</p> <p>research.development@eeamargarita.gr</p>	
 <p>Fundació Ramon Noguera</p>	<p>https://grupfrn.cat/en</p> <p>comunicacio@grupfrn.cat</p>	
 <p>Arcil</p>	<p>arcil.org.pt/</p> <p>arcil@arcil.org</p>	
 <p>Group of Research on Diversity – University of Girona</p>	<p>www.udg.edu/en/grupsrecerca/diversitat/qui-som</p> <p>judit.fullana@udg.edu</p>	
 <p>Tüv Hellas (Tüv Nord)</p>	<p>www.tuv-nord.com/gr/el/home/</p> <p>vvoudouris@tuv-nord.com</p>	
 <p>EASPD</p>	<p>www.easpd.eu/</p> <p>zoe.lardou@easpd.eu</p>	

2. INTRODUCTION

The EQUALvet project is an Erasmus+ project funded by the European Union, which aims to empower people with intellectual disabilities in a variety of disciplines, through training that must be adapted to the potential of the individual learner, without exclusion, and assist in their participation in examinations to certify their skills through objective, fair and reliable procedures.

In this context, three training centres in Spain, Portugal and Greece were commissioned to train people with intellectual disabilities in three vocations. Specifically, the training of the project participants was undertaken in Spain by the non-profit organisation 'Fundació Mas Xirgu', in Portugal by the non-governmental organisation 'ARCIL' and in Greece by the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita'. Each participant was trained in one of the following three vocations: 'Cooking Assistant', 'Cleaning Assistant' and 'Gardening Assistant', which was then accompanied by a certification exam in the respective specialty developed by TÜV HELLAS (TÜV NORD).

For the certification examinations of each specialty, a common questionnaire for the examinees of the three cooperating training institutions was developed, which was forwarded to the partners of the three countries, accompanied by the instructions and the terms of the examinations according to which the certification examinations should be conducted, and then it was translated into the respective language of the examinees. Each questionnaire contained a total of 20 equivalent multiple-choice questions, as well as guidelines for the candidates, which were to be conducted in writing by means of a face-to-face examination.

Upon completion of the certification examinations, all the material was forwarded again to TÜV HELLAS (TÜV NORD), which checked it, in order to issue the certificates of the respective specialty for the participants who passed and the attestations of participation in the certification examinations of the respective specialty for the participants who failed but completed the whole training and accreditation procedure. The certificates and attestations of participation were then forwarded to the respective partner, and they were awarded to the participants at an event organised by the respective partner.

It is worth noting that the success rate in the certification exams were extremely high for all the three vocations. In particular, for the specialty 'Cooking Assistant' there were totally 23 candidates, all of whom were successful. For the 'Cleaning Assistant' scheme, there were totally 28 candidates, of whom 26 succeeded and 2 that didn't. For the 'Gardening Assistant' specialty, there were totally 29 candidates, all of whom succeeded in the certification exams. In conclusion, there was a total of 80 candidates of which 78 were successful and 2 were unsuccessful. According to the above, the success rate for the certification examination was 97.5%.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME	SUCCESES	FAILURES
Cooking Assistant	23	0
Cleaning Assistant	26	2
Gardening Assistant	29	0
Total	78	2



On completion of the tests, each partner authored a report on the procedure of the examinations and the issues raised. Each partner's report was then sent to TÜV HELLAS (TÜV NORD) and used to composition of this report.

Consequently, the first chapter of this report discusses how the three partners conducted the examinations in Spain, Portugal and Greece, the issues that arose during the examinations and suggestions that, according to each partner, would help in conducting similar examinations. The second chapter draws conclusions on the problems encountered during the certification examinations, makes reference to suggestions that could help to avoid problems and make the conduct of the corresponding certification examinations smoother and more inclusive.

3. CERTIFICATION EXAMS IN SPAIN, PORTUGAL, AND GREECE

Spain

In Spain, the exams for the EQUALvet programme were carried out at the non-profit organisation 'Fundació Mas Xirgu'. The certification examinations, following on from the corresponding training courses, were aimed at people with intellectual disabilities and covered three vocational specializations: 'Cooking Assistant', 'Cleaning Assistant' and 'Gardening Assistant'.

Regarding the examinations for the specialty 'Gardening Assistant', they were conducted on May 31, 2022, and lasted thirty-five minutes. The examination was supervised by an employee of the Fundació Mas Xirgu, who didn't know the candidates personally.

It is worth noting that throughout the examination, candidates did not express any doubts as to the meaning of the questions, which may be attributed to the fact that all the questions contained pictures and, consequently, it was much easier for the candidates to understand the content of the questions.

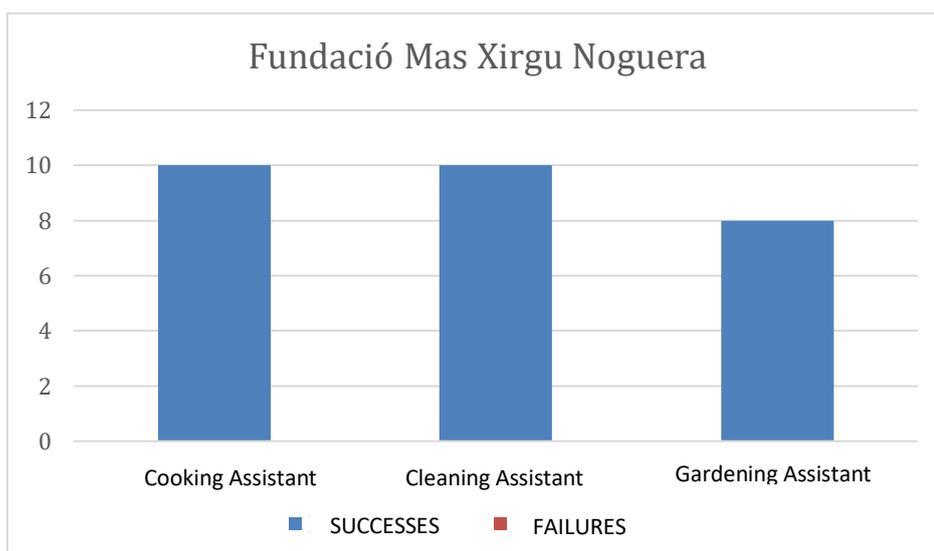
The exam for the 'Cleaning Assistant' scheme was held on June 1, 2022 and lasted thirty-five minutes. The exam invigilator read the questions aloud to assist the examinees in understanding them, as it was noticed that some examinees had difficulty in the reading comprehension.

Regarding the exams for the 'Cooking Assistant' scheme, they were held on May 30, 2022. They lasted totally forty minutes, and it seems that this time was enough for most of the examinees, but for some it was difficult to speed up, knowing that they only had this time, which made them nervous. It is worth noting that candidates reported that they found the exam quite easy.

Concerning the participation of candidates, totally 28 candidates took part in the examinations, all of whom succeeded. In particular, there were 10 candidates in total for the specialty 'Cooking assistant', all of whom were declared successful. There were also 10

candidates for the 'Cleaning Assistant' scheme, all of whom were successful, while for the 'Gardening Assistant' scheme there were 8 candidates, all of whom were successful.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME	SUCSESSES	FAILURES
Cooking Assistant	10	0
Cleaning Assistant	10	0
Gardening Assistant	8	0
Total	28	0



In general, the examinations were conducted for each candidate in order to check the learning outcomes and, consequently, the achievement of the corresponding professional skills. The examinees had been informed beforehand about the certification exams and they were aware of the necessity of these examinations and the way in which they were going to be conducted, since most of them had taken similar examinations in the past. However, the fact that they knew beforehand that they would have to take an exam after completing the training programme was a factor that caused them anxiety.

Throughout the exam, the candidates were quiet, although they were nervous. The questions that arose were few, so there was little need for assistance from the invigilator. Therefore, it

appears that one invigilator during the exams was sufficient and there was no need for a second one.

At the end of the exam, candidates expressed that, although they were nervous, they found the exam quite easy, except for some of them that they were more difficult. Nevertheless, the fact that the questions contained pictures and they were multiple-choice made it easier for the candidates to complete the exam , and for the invigilator to support the candidates.

Portugal

In Portugal, the certification exams for the EQUALvet programme were held at the non-governmental organisation 'ARCIL'. The certification exams, following on from the corresponding training courses, were aimed at people with intellectual disabilities and covered three areas of expertise: 'Cooking Assistant', 'Cleaning Assistant' and 'Gardening Assistant'.

The examinations were conducted on June 15, 2022, and the duration of each one ranged from forty-five to sixty minutes. The exams were carried out for each specialty separately, in a large room, where the examinees sat separately at a distance from each other. The questions were given to the examinees on a form on which they had to mark with a pen the answer they considered correct for each question. Each examination form contained a total of twenty equivalent closed-ended questions, and they were all identical for the examinees of the same specialty.

During the examinations there were two invigilators, who were responsible for supervising and supporting the candidates. The exam invigilators on the one hand presented the questions using a data show and read the questions and the options of answers aloud, while at the same time he was moving around among the candidates to resolve any queries and help the candidates understand the content of the questions and the answers to each question.

In terms of the methodology followed, the invigilators read the questions aloud one by one, giving the candidates time to choose their answer before proceeding to the next question. In many cases, the invigilators had to read some questions more than once in order to help all

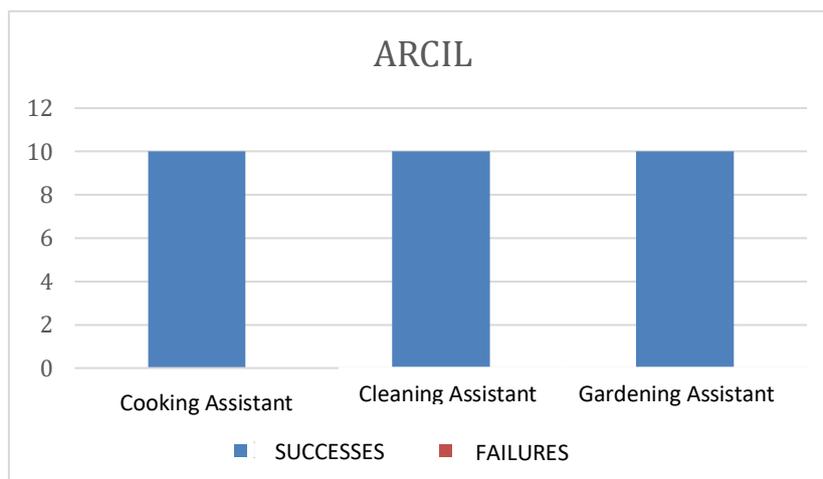
the candidates with the comprehension of them. At the end of the examination, they read the questions again one by one to ensure that all candidates had answered all the questions.

This need arose as the form of the answer sheet wasn't clear and accessible enough to all the candidates. For example, some questions were on a different page from the answer and on other, there was a lack of space between the questions, which caused confusion to some of the candidates. Therefore, the examiners decided not to 'zero' any question that had more than one answers was marked, as far as it was clear which answer the candidate finally wanted to select.

Another issue that arose during the examinations, according to the invigilators, was the fact that the examinees were not familiar with the correct behavior in the content of a written exam. Therefore, some candidates were stated loudly the answer they thought was correct for each question, while others felt uncertain about the answers they had chosen and sought confirmation from the invigilators. In these cases, the invigilators reminded the examinees of the correct behavior and the rules of a written examination.

As regards the participation of candidates, there were 30 candidates, all of whom succeeded. In particular, for the 'Cooking Assistant' scheme there were 10 candidates in total, all of whom were successful, for the 'Cleaning Assistant' there were also 10 candidates, all of whom were successful, and for the 'Gardening Assistant' category there were 10 candidates, all of whom were also successful.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME	SUCCESES	FAILURES
Chef Assistant	10	0
Cleaner Assistant	10	0
Gardener Assistant	10	0
Total	30	0



In conclusion, although their anxiety, all candidates completed the training programme satisfied with the experience and excited about the awarding of the certificates, while some indicated that they would be happy to participate in a similar programme in the future.

In resolving all the issues mentioned above, several indicative solutions could be proposed. It might be helpful to conduct individual tests or tests of smaller groups of candidates with similar abilities, that these could be assessed. Additionally, the presence of more invigilators than one would be important so as to support candidates simultaneously.

A principal issue that could be improved is the form of the candidates' answer sheet. In particular, it would be important to follow a clear structure, tailored to any reading or vision difficulties a candidate may face. In addition to that, the design of a digital format of the questionnaire would allow candidates to change their answer in a clearer way.

Greece

In Greece, the exams for the EQUALvet programme were conducted at the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita'. The certification exams, following the corresponding trainings, were addressed to people with intellectual disabilities and covered three specialties: 'Cooking Assistant', 'Cleaning Assistant' and 'Gardening Assistant'.

The exams were conducted on the 14 and 16 June 2022 and each one lasted forty minutes. The examinees were divided into rooms according to the specialty in which they participated, and they were spaced apart. The examination questions were given to the examinees on a form on which they had to write down in pen the answer they considered correct for each

question. Each examination form contained a total of twenty equivalent closed-ended questions, and they were all identical for examinees of the same discipline.

For each examination there was an invigilator, who was responsible for both supervising the examinations and supporting the examinees. However, it is worth noting that, as a result of the diverse needs of each examinee, it was not feasible for the invigilator to provide support to the examinees and to resolve any queries only in the first ten minutes, as it was stipulated in the examination guidelines.

During the examination, the invigilator read each question aloud one by one, giving the candidates time to mark the answer they considered correct on their own answer sheets. However, often the invigilator had to read the questions several times in order to support all the candidates. At the end of the examination, the invigilator read each question one by one to ensure that no-one candidate left any question unanswered.

In order to avoid this problem, it may be crucial to conduct the exams for each candidate individually or, alternatively, to conduct them in groups with fewer candidates per group. In addition, it would have groups of candidates of equal level and skills, in so far this could be calculated and measured. It would be certainly helpful if there were more than one invigilator in each examination, so that they could support the examinees individually at the same time.

One suggestion that could be supportive for the candidates is to apply exams digitally, with text-to-speech functions and providing each candidate with headphones so that they can read the questions individually, as many times as necessary and in the time required for each individual.

Similarly, it would be particularly important if all questions and answers contained pictures, so that it would be easier for each examinee to understand the text of each question and answer with the help of a visual representation of their content.

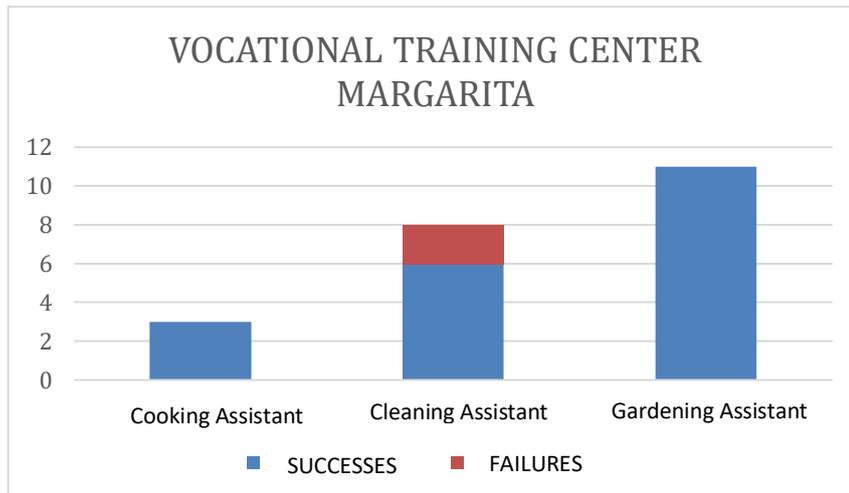
It should also be noted that the examiners observed some confusion on the part of the examinees on how to select the correct answer and, in particular, it was not entirely clear whether they should circle the entire correct answer or circle the number of each answer they thought was correct or mark the correct answer with a specific symbol.

Consequently, the instructions included on each examinee's answer sheet stated that: 'In case that you have marked two answers, the question will be zeroed'. However, some candidates would initially select a question and, after treading the possible answers again, they decided to change their original answer. As a result, some candidates' answer sheets were messier. Therefore, a digital version of the exams could help to avoid this problem and lead candidates to choose the answer they consider correct in a clearer way.

Apart from all the above, there were also other issues observed during the examinations. While reading a question, the first reaction of some candidates was to say their opinion about the answer in a loud voice. In this case, the invigilators would remind the candidates of the procedure to be followed. In other cases, some candidates felt insecure and asked for the invigilator's confirmation about the answer they wanted to choose. The invigilator then encouraged them to choose the answer they preferred, without specifying whether it was correct or not.

As regards the number of candidates, a total of 22 candidates participated, of whom 20 succeeded and 2 didn't. In particular, there were 3 candidates for the 'Cooking Assistant' scheme, all of whom succeeded, 8 candidates for the 'Cleaning Assistant', of whom 6 were successful and 2 unsuccessful, and 11 candidates for the 'Gardening Assistant', all of whom were successful. In total, there were 2 candidates who, due to excessive stress, they dropped out of the examinations and ultimately did not participate, and one candidate who had difficulty keeping up with the other examinees in terms answered the questions in a random manner, without paying attention to the meaning of the questions and answers, respectively.

CERTIFICATION SCHEME	SUCCESSSES	FAILURES
Cooking Assistant	3	0
Cleaning Assistant	6	2
Gardening Assistant	11	0
Total	20	2



In the end, the candidates who completed the exam, despite the stress they faced, were excited about the experience and the awarding of the certificates and they said that they would like to participate in similar exams for other specialties in the future. Those candidates who were not successful in the certification examinations received an attestation of participation in the examinations accordingly and expressed a desire to participate in a re-examination. It is important to mention that many candidates studied on their own time to prepare for the exam and not only during their training period, which proves that the participation in this programme was extremely important for them.

In summary, the full process had a positive impact on the candidates and any problems reported were resolved immediately with the assistance of the supervisors. However, improving the process of the examinations is important in order to increase the autonomy of people with intellectual disabilities, always in line with the reliability of the certification examinations.

4. CONCLUSIONS - SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

Based on the testing process and the difficulties encountered by the participants and the invigilators during the tests, we could focus on specific parameters that could potentially be improved.

The first factor that is decisive for the conduct of those examinations is their duration. Specifically, the examinations conducted at the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita' lasted 40 minutes, so did those conducted at the 'Fundació Mas Xirgu', where the examinees completed the examinations in approximately 35 minutes, although they had difficulties in trying to speed up so as to complete the examinations in time. On the other hand, at 'ARCIL' the examination took approximately 45 minutes to 60 minutes to be completed. In conclusion, it would be potentially important for the exams to last up to 60 minutes in order to be possible for all the examinees to complete the exam on time and without feeling stressed by the time pressure.

The second factor to consider is the number of invigilators. As the 'Fundació Mas Xirgu' reported, one supervisor was sufficient and there was no need for a second supervisor to assist. On the contrary, both the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita' and 'ARCIL' noted that it would be important to have more than one invigilator so that they could support the examinees at the same time. It is therefore felt that there is a need for at least two invigilators during the examinations so that they can act supportively for the candidates and manage any queries and issues that arise simultaneously.

Another factor, for which several issues have arisen, is the form of the questionnaire. In particular, 'Fundació Mas Xirgu' noted that the fact that the questions were multiple-choice and that there were pictures in all the questions and answers, worked decisively to ensure that the candidates could easily understand the content of the questions and complete the questionnaire without difficulty, and that the invigilators could easily manage any doubts and support the candidates. However, the examination form did not work as supportively for participants from 'Vocational Training Center Margarita', whose invigilators observed confusion on the part of candidates as to the correct way of selecting the answer they considered correct, nor for 'ARCIL', where it was not fully clear and accessible for all the candidates. From all of the above, it is clear that the questionnaire's format should have a

more accessible structure, so that it would be easier for the examinees to understand its content and to answer the questions without difficulty. Undoubtedly, the use of pictures would work as an aid to this, so that all of the candidates could easily understand the meaning of the questions and the answers offered. However, it is also necessary to provide a form with a clear way to all of the examinees of how to select or change their answers. In this context, it would also be important to explore the possibility of conducting the examinations digitally, where a digital questionnaire could help candidates to select or change their answers more easily and without confusion. However, it should be borne in mind that conducting the exams digitally is likely to raise other issues in respect of the candidates' computer skills.

In addition to all the above, it is important to consider issues that have arisen regarding the methodology followed in each institution. More specifically, at 'Fundació Mas Xirgu', the invigilator read aloud the questions and the suggested answers in order to help the candidates understand the meaning of them. In 'ARCIL', the questionnaire was showed digitally to all examinees and then, as in the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita', the invigilator read aloud each question and the suggested answers so that each examinee could mark the answer he or she considered correct on his or her answer sheet, while there was a need for the invigilator to support the examinees in any concerns. In order to avoid the above, it would be probably crucial to design a digital questionnaire where each examinee, using headphones, could listen to the questions and answers individually as many times as he or she needed, an issue which, however, could certainly raise various problems regarding the level of technological literacy and computer skills of each examinee. It would also be decisive if the tests were administered to each candidate individually or in small groups of examinees with as similar a level of skill as possible, although this would be difficult to calculate.

It would also be important to focus on the general behaviour of the participants and their reactions during the certification exams. As the invigilators reported to 'Fundació Mas Xirgu', the examinees remained quiet throughout the exam, but it was obvious that they were stressed. At the end of the exam, they said that they felt anxious, but also, that the questionnaire was quite easy. Similarly, at ARCIL, despite the anxiety among the candidates, all participants completed the exam satisfied with the experience and excited about the awarding of the certificates and stated that they would like to repeat the process in the future

for similar skills. The same was reported by candidates at the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita', although there were two participants who found it quite difficult to concentrate.

Finally, there were several other issues that arose and they worth mentioning. In particular, colleagues at 'Fundació Mas Xirgu' reported that some examinees had difficulty understanding the meaning of the questions they were reading, while the 'Vocational Training Center Margarita' noted that on several occasions, the invigilator had to read the same question aloud several times in order to help all candidates understand the meaning of it. 'ARCIL' also noted the same matter, while also, stated that many candidates were not familiar with the rules of the written examinations, and they often said in a loud voice the answers they considered correct. In this context, it is clear that questions should be as easy to understand as possible, with pictures representing their content and a clear structure.

Along with all of the above, there is an evident need to support students with intellectual disabilities from the very beginning of their education. In particular, it is necessary for the trainer to distinguish the particular needs of each examinee, as far as possible, and to support them in each case according to those needs. From the very beginning of their training, the trainee should be prepared for the conditions of the examinations in which they going to participate, the rules of those examinations and the behavior that they should follow, as well as the duration of the exams. It may be advisable for the trainer to conduct simulation tests in order to familiarize the trainees with the exams procedure and to ensure that they are able to manage their time. In addition to that, it is important to carry out simulation tests so that the trainees will be familiar with the context of the questionnaire and that the terms of the statements of the questionnaire would be clear. For example, it should be clear to the examines the meaning of the instructions or questions included in a question and when, they have to choose one of the answers offered or to match the answers to each other, as well as being familiar with the distinction between the most important terms, in which they should focus on, when reading a question.

However, the contribution of the instructor during the preparation of the examinees for the certification exams is also important, on helping them to plan their study. In particular, the instructor can help the participants to properly organize the exam material by dividing it into individual chapters, creating a study plan with them, as well as helping them to identify

methods that could help them understand the main points of it by keeping headings based on the key words of the material, underlining them or recording them in individual notes-bookmarks and any other way could help each examinee to organize the material to better consolidate it.

The support of the examinees is one of the most important points for both their training instructors and the invigilator of the certification examinations. During the examinations, the issues, and concerns of the examinees that the invigilator may have to deal with are varied. It must therefore support each candidate individually, while always respecting the reliability of the exams, and encouraging the candidates to choose the answers they consider correct, without worrying that there will be adverse consequences if it is wrong. The same applies in cases of beneficiaries, who get stressed when they do not know the correct answer to a question. The invigilator must in this case encourage the candidate to leave the specific question unanswered and move on to the next one, with the aim of coming back to it later.

5. EPILOGUE

The EQUALvet programme was an educational and professional advancement effort aimed at people with intellectual disabilities. For this purpose, three training centres, in Spain 'Fundació Mas Xirgu', in Portugal 'ARCIL' and in Greece 'Vocational Training Center Margarita', undertook the training of people with intellectual disabilities in one of the three specialties, 'Cooking Assistant', 'Cleaning Assistant' and 'Gardening Assistant', which was then accompanied by their participation in certification examinations in the respective specialty by the international certification body, TÜV HELLAS (TÜV NORD).

During the certification examinations, a variety of issues arose concerning the duration of the examination, the duties of the invigilator, the structure of the questionnaire and the methodology of the examinations. However, those issues could be a reason to focus even more on improving the procedures and factors surrounding certification examinations for people with intellectual disabilities in order to make them carried out without problems.

For this reason, it would be important to extend the duration of the certification exams up to 60 minutes, and to have at least two invigilators, so that they can support candidates at the same time. It would also seem advisable that the examinations be conducted in smaller groups and, in case that this can be feasible and measurable, between individuals with similar needs and abilities. It is also important to pay attention to the way in which the answer sheet is structured so that the questions are easy to understand, but also have a clear way in which the candidates should select the answer they consider correct and the way in which they can change their answer afterwards.

Another important aspect that could potentially solve many of the problems encountered in is the development of digital examinations tailored to the needs of each candidate. However, in this case, it should be taken into account the range of needs that could arise and the level of computer literacy among the candidates, which could cause a variety of issues in the conduct of the examination.

In conclusion, the holding of the certification examinations for EQUALvet programme could be an opportunity to focus the interest on the holding of similar training and certification programmes for people with intellectual disabilities. It is a fact that many of the participants,

in all the three countries where the examinations were held, expressed satisfaction with their participation in this programme and their desire to participate again in similar programmes to acquire other skills in the future.

The high success rate of the participants, which amounted to 97.5%, with a total of 78 successful participants out of 80 participants, proves that people with intellectual disabilities are fully capable of participating in training programmes in a variety of specializations and of pursuing their professional development through modern professional certification procedures based on fair, objective, and reliable examinations.

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