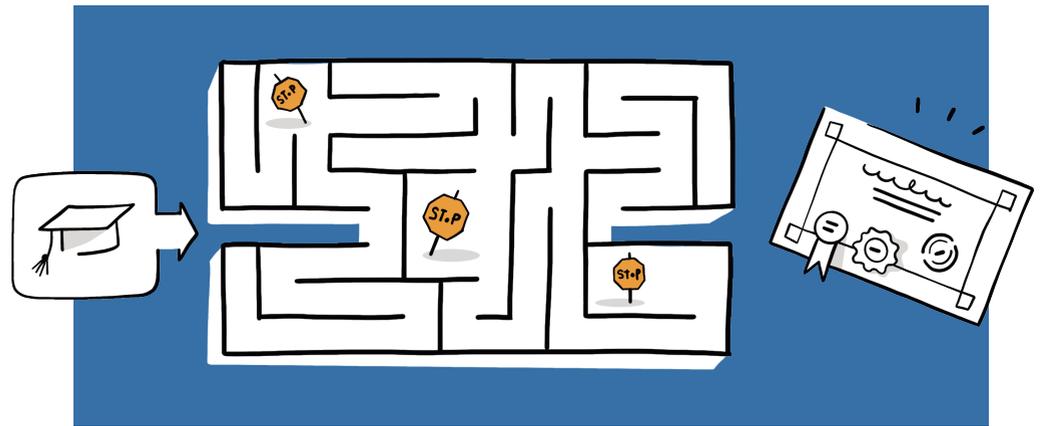


A summer of love, or how to support young graduates from Spain and France in their cross-border careers



Leyre Azcona, Project Manager for employment, education and innovation at the Euroregion Nouvelle-Aquitaine Euskadi Navarre (NAEN), confirms that

It was love at first sight when Irati and François met during their summer holidays in the Pyrenees in 2019. They both knew that it was the start of something serious. And since Irati had just finished her professional training as an early-childhood educator in Pamplona (Spain), she did not have to think twice and decided to move to Pau (France) where François was working in the metal industry. It was no secret that there was a high demand for child educators in France, so she thought she would easily settle into her new home.

But what had started as a perfect love story soon turned out to be a journey into a bureaucratic nightmare. Whereas it is indeed relatively easy nowadays to work in another European country after having obtained a university diploma, the situation is completely different for regulated professions in the social, educational and health sectors which, on the other hand, are extremely relevant in cross-border contexts. And although Irati managed to catch the interest of potential employers and was called back for several interviews, they refused to take on the administrative battle to hire her and to have her diplomas recognised, which would have taken up to several years in the worst case.

The main problem is the lack of recognition of regulated professions in the social, educational and health sectors between France and Spain, which makes cross-border employment mobility an almost impossible endeavour.

“ in the area of vocational training there are many barriers still, since these are regulated professions, and many different regional and state administrations are in charge of recognising the diplomas. Often you end up having to travel to Madrid or Paris to find a solution. ”

The Euroregion wanted to help young graduates and decided to set up the KOMPAR network in 2015 to support the employability of students in the cross-border area and to raise awareness on the obstacles they are facing when entering the job market on the other side of the border. Altogether, eleven vocational education centres between France and northern Spain are participating in the project, with the objective of shedding a light on how to get professional titles recognised in the neighbouring country. They also organise study visits and exchanges of good practices between French and Spanish professors or students.

Their participation in the *b-solutions* project also allowed the NAEN Euroregion to study each profession on a case-by-case basis and to come up with lists of requirements that are needed to get a professional title accredited and to identify which institution is in charge. Sometimes, the recognition simply means adding a six months internship or one subject/course that is required in the neighbouring country to exercise the profession in question.

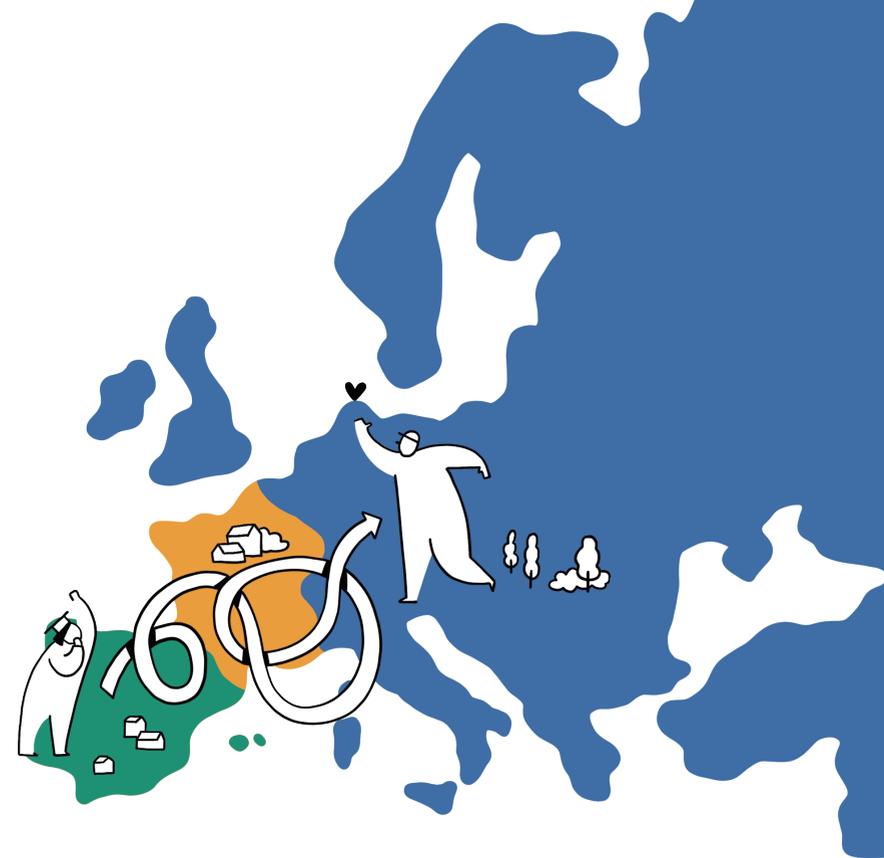
For the next step, they have planned to meet the persons in charge of employment issues in each region as well as the certifying institutions to raise further awareness of these challenges and to work jointly on common solutions to facilitate the accreditation process.

Undoubtedly, the problem also occurs in other European countries, and the European Commission has recently set up a database¹ to compare diplomas and professional requirements.

What kinds of solutions exist in the long-term?

Apart from raising awareness and lobbying among the diversity of actors in charge of accreditation and certification (which only works for precisely identified degrees), some legal measures can also be taken:

- A French-Spanish framework agreement would be a general solution allowing vocational training centres to validate skills and qualifications of diplomas and certificates that are not precisely regulated.
- Another solution could be to mutually validate degrees and professional qualifications between both countries. This would mean that when a Spanish professional looks for a job in France, he or she would be able to do so with their Spanish diploma or skills certificate without any further need for accreditation or certification.



In addition, the KOMPAR training centres are working with the local authorities on practical solutions to provide the missing requirements, such as internships or certain subjects/courses between both countries.

Until all of this is resolved, Irati and Franc ois are looking for a temporary solution to keep their relationship alive. The easiest option would be for Irati to look for a job in Spain and to embark on a long-distance relationship. Plan B could be to accept a less qualified non-regulated job in the field of early childhood education, which is not an easy decision for Irati, whose dream job was to work with young kids... To be continued...

¹ European Commission. *The EU Single Market – Regulated professions database*, <https://ec.europa.eu/growth/tools-databases/regprofil/index.cfm>.