



ERA+ Clinical Leadership in Nursing Education



Blog: Putting curricula to the test — evaluating the integration of the Clinical Leadership framework

Developing a competency framework for Clinical Leadership (CL) was the first step. The next question was: to what extent do current nursing curricula already support the development of these competencies — and where do the gaps lie?

To address this question, the CL in Nursing Education project developed a set of guidelines for a structured curriculum analysis, based on the framework developed in an earlier phase of the project. These guidelines provided partner institutions with a practical and shared tool to examine their nursing programmes through the lens of CL. They will also be made available to anyone interested in applying the same approach to other curricula.

Based on these guidelines, workshops were organised in each partner country, bringing together nursing educators, practising nurses and students. The curriculum evaluation comprised two complementary components: a SWOT analysis of the nursing curriculum, informed by the framework, and a gap identification exercise, in which participants assessed the extent to which the different CL domains and competencies were present or addressed throughout the curriculum. Together, these approaches provided a comprehensive picture of where curricula already align with the framework and where further development may be needed.

The identification of these gaps is a crucial step: it translates a theoretical framework into a concrete starting point for curriculum reflection and, ultimately, for change. The satisfaction questionnaires completed after the workshops further indicated that the workshops were well designed for their purpose, supporting the validity of the methodology used.

The preliminary results suggest that the exercise provides a valuable means of assessing the integration of CL within nursing curricula. At the same time, there is no uniformity across partner institutions: the extent to which CL is addressed, and the specific domains and competencies emphasised, vary between curricula. Some curricula place greater emphasis on particular domains or competencies, while others prioritise different competencies that nevertheless fall clearly within the scope of CL. These differences may partly reflect the distinct educational and professional contexts in which nurses are prepared and practise. However, they also point to an opportunity for greater convergence, grounded in a shared understanding of the values and competencies that underpin nursing and CL.

Despite these differences, one message emerges consistently: there is room to strengthen the integration of CL into nursing education, but the commitment to developing clinical leadership is already present.

Importantly, the value of the workshops extended beyond the results of the curriculum analysis itself. The discussions, exchange of ideas and diversity of perspectives among educators, practitioners and students reinforced the relevance of CL to contemporary nursing. The engagement of participants reflected a shared commitment to strengthening nursing, starting with one of its fundamental pillars: the initial education and preparation of nurses.

The workshops also demonstrated that CL can and should be fostered throughout nursing education and across different learning contexts. Developing leadership competencies in students means creating opportunities for them to become more confident and prepared to lead in clinical practice.

The insights gathered through the workshops, together with the guidelines developed, are now informing practical recommendations for strengthening the teaching of CL. These recommendations will be made available through the project's open library.

Ultimately, investing in student leadership means investing in the future of nursing. Students who develop leadership competencies today can become nurses who lead change tomorrow — strengthening the profession and its contribution to health systems. By making Clinical Leadership visible and meaningful from the beginning of nurses' education, we can help ensure that nursing continues to play a crucial role in shaping the future of healthcare while remaining an attractive and inspiring profession for future generations.