

"Strengthening Soft Skills in Dentistry Education Across Europe"

DENTA SOFT - From Vision to Impact. Building Soft Skills in Dental Education"

How we started?

The DENTA-SOFT project was launched under the Erasmus+ KA220 Strategic Partnerships in Higher Education framework, with the goal of enhancing soft skills training in the dental education Curriculum across European universities. Coordinated by Medical University of Sofia (Bulgaria), the project brought together a consortium of forward-thinking institutions from Bulgaria, Turkey, Romania and Greece.



PROJECT DENTA-SOFT



A SHARED EUROPEAN VISION IN DENTAL EDUCATION

In the evolving landscape of higher medical education, competence is no longer defined solely by knowledge or technical skill. The ability to communicate with empathy, to collaborate within a team, to listen, adapt, and reflect — these transversal competences have become essential elements in the formation of future healthcare professionals.

The Erasmus+ Project "Exploration, Evaluation, and Application of Transversal Competences among Undergraduate Dental Medicine Students (KA220-HED)", coordinated by the Medical University of Sofia (Bulgaria), with partners from Spain, Turkey, Greece, and Romania (Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy, Iași), was established to explore how such competences can be effectively developed, assessed, and integrated into dental curricula across Europe.

Together, the partner institutions share a mission to enhance both the professional and human dimensions of dental education — building a model in which scientific precision coexists with empathy, ethical responsibility, and interpersonal understanding

A CONSORTIUM FOR HUMANISTIC INNOVATION

The five partner universities brought their complementary expertise to the project:

- The **Medical University of Sofia**, as project leader, provided the strategic framework and coordination.
- The **Grigore T. Popa University of Medicine and Pharmacy of Iași**, through its Faculty of Dental Medicine, implemented assessment programs and research on communication competences.
- The **partner universities from Spain, Turkey, and Greece** contributed to the creation of educational resources, digital tools, and innovative teaching methodologies.

This network fostered a strong exchange of experience, promoting a European standard for dental education based on empathy, communication, and cultural awareness.



IMPLEMENTATION AT UMPH IAȘI – FROM CONCEPT TO PRACTICE



At the Faculty of Dental Medicine, UMPH Iași, project implementation was structured around three main objectives:

- 1. Exploration** – introducing students to the meaning and importance of transversal competences in professional life;
- 2. Evaluation** – assessing the development of these competences through standardized methods;
- 3. Application** – encouraging their practical use in simulated and clinical contexts.

Activities included interactive presentations for students across all six years of study, practical workshops, and clinical communication exercises. Educational materials were distributed – including the Workbook: Summary of Soft Skills in Dental Medicine, personalized USB drives, and promotional leaflets summarizing the project's aims, activities, and schedule.

Students were invited to register voluntarily for upcoming training sessions, creating a growing community interested in personal and professional development beyond the technical curriculum.

ASSESSMENT OF COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES – RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION

The structured communication assessment involved **116 dental students**, of whom **79.3% were female** and **20.7% male** – a ratio representative of current dental programs in Romania.

The evaluation addressed five key areas: **verbal empathy**, **clarity and structure of communication**, **interaction management**, **non-verbal behavior**, and **adaptation of language to patient understanding**.

The results were highly encouraging: **88% of students achieved “Excellent” results**, while the remaining **12% were rated as “Very good”**. No participant scored below satisfactory thresholds. Among the **most prominent strengths**, the evaluators noted:

- the use of empathetic and supportive language (29.3%);
- active listening and emotional responsiveness (25.9%);
- and non-verbal expressiveness and attentive posture (14.7%).

These findings confirm that students have already internalized key aspects of patient-centered communication and demonstrate confidence in clinical dialogue.

However, the analysis also revealed **areas where improvement remains possible**, particularly in the more nuanced dimensions of clinical communication.

Approximately **27.6%** of students could improve in **explicitly acknowledging patient emotions**, while **17.2%** were advised to **simplify technical or medical language** and **12.9%** to make broader use of **open-ended questions** to encourage patient participation.

From an educational standpoint, these findings provide practical guidance for refining teaching strategies, particularly in early clinical training.

Gender-Based Observations:

While the overall level of competence was consistently high across genders, minor differences were observed.

Female students tended to perform slightly better in **active listening and empathy**, while male students demonstrated stronger skills in **summary and patient explanation**. Statistically, **male students required more frequent re-evaluation sessions**, suggesting that personalized feedback and structured guidance are particularly beneficial for them.

Further analysis showed **borderline variations** in interaction and summary skills, though these differences were not significant in terms of overall competence.

Rather than indicating disparities, they highlight diverse learning preferences – reinforcing the need for **adaptive, student-centered approaches** that match educational style to individual strengths.



DEVELOPING COMPETENCES THROUGH REFLECTION AND FEEDBACK

Feedback collected from students after the evaluation revealed a mature understanding of the learning process.

Many participants emphasized the value of **observing senior clinicians** as communication models (29.3%), followed by **developing personal improvement plans** (12.1%), **receiving targeted feedback from supervisors** (11.2%), and **participating in structured communication workshops** (8.6%).

This demonstrates that students not only recognize the importance of soft skills but also seek **active involvement in self-directed learning**. The process of observing, reflecting, and applying feedback was widely regarded as the most efficient path for sustainable improvement.

In essence, students perceived communication not as a secondary attribute, but as **a clinical skill equal in importance to diagnosis or treatment**.



Dissemination – Sharing Knowledge, Expanding Horizons:

Dissemination has played a central role in the success of the KA220-HED project.

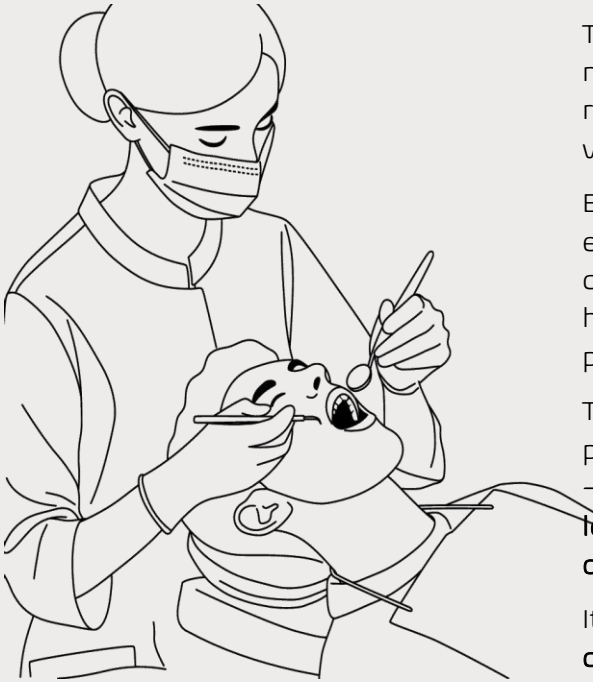
At UMPH Iași, an extensive dissemination strategy ensured that the project's outcomes reached not only the original participant group but also new generations of students.

A wide range of actions was implemented:

- Interactive presentations introducing transversal competences to all study years (I–VI);
- Distribution of materials such as the Workbook, USB drives, and project leaflets;
- Digital publication of summaries, worksheets, and visual resources;
- Invitations for new students to join advanced training workshops;
- Reports in university newsletters, faculty meetings, and online platforms, increasing both visibility and long-term engagement.

Through these efforts, transversal competences have become a recurring topic of discussion within the faculty – not just a project activity, but a lasting educational value.

EDUCATIONAL AND EUROPEAN IMPACT



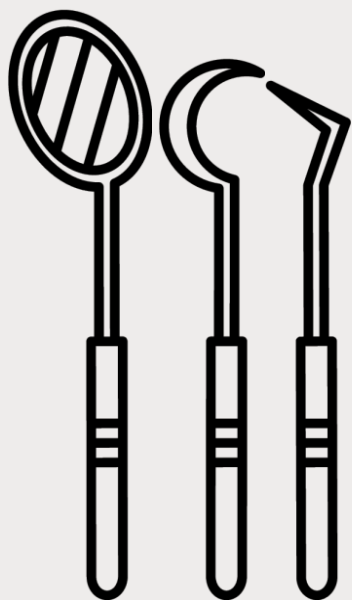
The Erasmus+ KA220-HED project goes beyond a local or national initiative. It is part of a **wider European effort** to redefine professional education through humanistic values.

By combining the leadership of Bulgaria, the applied experience of Romania, and the methodological creativity of Spain, Turkey, and Greece, the consortium has built a common language of empathy and professionalism in medical education.

This collaboration demonstrates that international partnerships can effectively translate abstract concepts – such as empathy or ethical behavior – into **concrete learning models, assessment tools, and measurable outcomes**.

It also reinforces the growing consensus that **communication, ethics, and critical reflection** must be viewed not as complementary, but as **core competences** in the medical profession.





FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The next phase of KA220-HED will focus on expanding its educational and scientific legacy through:

- Development of digital and blended training modules, integrating self-assessment tools and virtual case studies;
- Interdisciplinary workshops and international conferences, facilitating dialogue between educators, researchers, and practitioners;
- The creation of a European reference framework for the evaluation and implementation of transversal competences in medicine and dentistry.

Through these steps, the project will continue to contribute to a **European model of education** that values both technical excellence and human connection.





CONCLUSION

Dentistry, like medicine, is both a science and a dialogue.

The Erasmus+ KA220-HED project reminds us that communication, empathy, and collaboration are not secondary qualities — they are essential instruments of care.

By cultivating transversal competences, this initiative helps shape professionals who not only restore health but also inspire trust, understanding, and confidence in their patients.

The project thus affirms a simple but powerful truth: **the best treatment begins with listening.**



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KA220-HED stands as a model of European cooperation, uniting science, empathy, and innovation to build a generation of dental professionals who communicate with clarity, act with compassion, and lead with integrity.