

Desk research about learning outcomes for prior learning recognition to see recent situation (Task A1)

Toolkit for RPL

IO1: Learning Outcomes Report in structured matrixes

Executive Summary

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This executive summary resumes the final report elaborated in the scope of IO1 – Task A1 of the project “EQF oriented assessment tools for prior learning in adult education” (Toolkit for RPL). The main goal of the report is to assemble the information about the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the partner countries - Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, and Turkey.

According to the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning,¹ the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) means the validation of learning outcomes, whether from formal education or non-formal or informal learning, acquired before requesting validation.

The RPL process implies necessarily another concept: validation, which means, according to the mentioned Recommendation, a process of confirmation by an authorised body that an individual has acquired learning outcomes measured against a relevant standard and consists of the following four distinct phases: Identification; Documentation Formal assessment and Certification.

In what regards to Adult Education and Training in the partner countries, the analysis of the Eurostat quantitative official data (concerning the years 2016, 2017 and 2018) reveals that, although the slight decrease verified between 2016 and 2018 of the number of the adult people with low education level, a considerable percentage of the adult population has low school attainment which has significant implications in the unemployment rates and in the economic structure of the countries. This decreasing is certainly in line with all the Lifelong Learning initiatives and policies at the European level.

In **Austria**, adult education comprises various actions, such as teaching, supervision of groups, counseling, guidance, education management, and library services. Adult education and training is played on by various government institutions, NGOs and private institutions, with the majority of educational offers being provided by NGOs, institutions run by the social partners and commercial providers. The existing types of adult education training provisions are: Raise Achievement in Basic Skills; Achieve a Recognised Qualification during

¹http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf

Adulthood; Transition to the Labour Market; Liberal (Popular) Adult Education; Types of Publicly Subsidised Provision for Adult Learners.

In **Bulgaria**, adult education and training system covers all the educational and qualification levels of general, vocational, higher education and adult learning and in all its aspects - formal, non-formal and informal learning. Adult learning programs support the acquisition and continuous development of the nine key core competences for adult learning recognized by RPL processes in Bulgaria.

In **Greece**, the "general adult education", which includes all organised learning activities addressing adults is provided by institutions of formal education or non-formal education. All forms of organized adult education are provided by the public, municipal or private institutions. Vocational education and training (VET) options available are: vocational training programmes offered by post-secondary VET schools IEK (EQF Level 5); higher professional programmes offered by higher schools (EQF Level 5); adult learning courses (Continuing vocational education and training offered by LLCs and other bodies providing LLL and other training for employees and/or unemployed and other vulnerable groups).

In **Portugal**, adult education and training provisions are diversified and oriented towards specific aims and target groups: to raise achievement in basic skills; Portuguese for speakers of other languages; to achieve a recognised qualification during adulthood (Adult education and training courses); transition to the labour market; certified modular training; other adult education (Senior Citizen Universities); other types of State-funded courses for adult learners (Lifelong Learning: back to school education - recurrent education).

In **Turkey**, the education system is structured in two main areas: formal and non-formal education. Non-formal education includes arrangements and activities to meet the educational needs of all individuals - young and adult, at any age. Courses are organised in institutions operating under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning related to adult education accepted as part of Lifelong Learning.

In what concerns the Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning, according to the Global

Observatory of Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning of UNESCO², it is one of the pillars of any lifelong learning policy, although its level of development differs from country to country.

In **Austria**, there is no overall framework for the validation of prior learning. A national strategy is currently being developed in close coordination with the processes to develop a National Qualifications Framework and to implement a lifelong learning strategy. The Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (WBA) recognizes formally acquired competences as well as competences that have been obtained in non-formal or informal ways. The recognition is validated in a two-level process, graduates achieve the WBA-certificate (basic degree) and as a next step the WBA diploma (specific degree). A completed vocational education or a school qualification, above compulsory secondary school level, is required as well as practical experience in the sector must be proven. There is a limitation for the learning outcomes and competences because WBA's certification or diploma work is limited for teachers/trainers, counselors, educational managers and librarians/informational managers. The Austrian Integration Fund provides support and funding for formal recognition.

In **Bulgaria**, there is no national system for validation covering all educational sectors. RPL is most developed in the VET sector. Validation arrangements including recognition of prior learning (RPL) currently exist in relation to general, vocational and adult education. The validation of non-formal and informal learning is supported by appropriate guidance and counseling. The National Agency for Vocational Education and Training plays a key role in the process of modernisation of the VET system. The informal skills assessment is part of the three-step process (skills assessment/ audit; learning offer; validation and recognition). Disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment, over 16, benefit from validation and RPL. At the higher education level, some aspects of validation, in terms of awarding credits and access to higher education, are covered by the Higher Education Act.

In **Greece**, there is not any specific nationally implemented system for recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning. However,

² <http://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation>

there are some approaches that support the assessment of qualifications and classify them at certain levels: a “translation” device in higher education that enables the comparison of different qualifications; the certification of outputs, that is, the results of non-formal education, as well as informal learning, i.e, the knowledge, skills and competences that individuals will acquire during learning; the certification of the input to lifelong learning (the occupational profiles, training centre infrastructures, trainers, training programmes, training materials etc). EOPPEP is the National Organization for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, operates under the supervision of the Minister of Education & Religious Affairs, Culture & Sports.

In **Portugal**, the New Opportunities Initiative was created at the end of 2005 with the objective to overcome the structural deficit in qualifications by making general schooling available to the population. The recognition, validation, and certification of competences process is part of the National Qualifications System and is currently developed in the Qualifica Centres. The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training ensures the development and management of the National System for the Recognition, Validation, and Certification of Competences. The process is based on a set of methodological assumptions (competences audit, autobiographical approach) that enable the identification, recognition, validation, and certification of previously acquired competences by adults throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. In higher education, validation of non-formal and informal learning is carried out, through correspondence to learning units’ outcomes identified within study plans. Therefore, where the adult domain is concerned, a considerable effort has been made to recognise, validate and certificate competences gained in formal, informal and non-formal contexts.

In **Turkey**, the priority is the implementation of systems for the validation of non-formal and informal learning. One of the main goals is the development of the Turkish Qualifications Framework already in place. The main institutions for RPL are: Ministry of Education, Vocational Qualification Authority (VQA); Universities; NGOs. Recognition and prioritisation procedures are carried out in 27 areas and 142 branches in Vocational Education Centres. RPL is basically

done in two ways. Those who have exercised a profession in the past but do not have any vocational training certificate related to the occupation are required to apply to the nearest Vocational Training Centre. The second way is to enter the exam by applying to the Personnel Certification bodies authorized by the Vocational Qualification Authority.

In conclusion, it is a fact that, due to the diverse social and cultural contexts of each partner country, differences are naturally found in adult education and training and RPL systems.

In all partner countries, the number of adults with less than primary, primary and lower education has been decreasing, although this decrease does not yet satisfy the high number of adults in this condition, neither the European targets and goals in these matters. It is also natural that partner countries have similarities in their systems and are increasingly moving towards narrowing the gap between them, since several policies, strategies, and initiatives on lifelong learning have been drawn up at European level. All project partner countries either through public or private entities provide education and training to their adults, particularly those in disadvantaged situations, such as the low skilled, low qualified, early school leavers, unemployed adults.

As regards recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning, there are again differences in the processes carried out in the different countries, especially regarding the recipients and the educational sectors involved in validation. In fact, national approaches to set up these arrangements vary: some countries take a national approach, while others focus on specific sectors. Opportunities for validation exist across the different sectors of education and extend into the labour market and third sector to varying degrees.³

Due to the described situation and considering the project's goals, partners should identify a successful RPL approach (kind of best practice) which can be used as reference for the partnership. This means a system which embraces a considerable range of beneficiaries and levels of education and training, and follows the RPL phases as described at 2012 Council Recommendation. The RPL experience and

³ European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update Synthesis report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.

system in Portugal complies with all these features and therefore can be used as a reference for the next steps of the project, namely the structured matrixes for better understanding how to aggregate competences into qualifications (descriptions of the competences, knowledge and skills) and the career guidance toolkit for professionals. In fact, it will be important to understand how to design qualifications based on learning outcomes, how to describe occupational profiles, considering NQF qualification levels. This will culminate in the elaboration of a recognition of prior learning assessment module (O2), providing an overview of the main concepts, assumptions, principles, practices, logics, strategies and instruments of RPL, consolidated with documents/forms for the prior learning recognition process.