

# **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**

## **Final Report**

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## Introduction

The following report was produced according to the national reports elaborated in the scope of IO1 – Task A1 of the project: EQF oriented assessment tools for prior learning in adult education (Toolkit for RPL).

Before starting to accomplish the main goal of this common report, namely, to assemble the information about the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) in the partner countries - Austria, Bulgaria, Greece, Portugal, and Turkey - it is important to clarify some important concepts on this topic.

According to the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning,<sup>1</sup> 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. Now, aiming the full understanding of the RPL itself it is important to define the following concepts based on the referred council recommendation:

- Formal learning means learning which takes place in an organised and structured environment, specifically dedicated to learning, and typically leads to the award of a qualification, usually in the form of a certificate or a diploma; it includes systems of general education, initial vocational training, and higher education;
- Non-formal learning means learning which takes place through planned activities (in terms of learning objectives, learning time) where some form of learning support is present (e.g. student-teacher relationships); it may cover programmes to impart work skills, adult literacy and basic education for early school leavers; very common cases of non-formal learning include in-company training, through which companies update and improve the skills of their workers such as ICT skills, structured online learning (e.g. by making use of open educational resources), and courses organised by civil society organisations for their members, their target group or the general public;

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<sup>1</sup>[http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council\\_Recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_validation\\_20\\_December\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf)

- Informal learning means learning resulting from daily activities related to work, family or leisure and is not organised or structured in terms of objectives, time or learning support; it may be unintentional from the learner's perspective; examples of learning outcomes acquired through informal learning are skills acquired through life and work experiences, project management skills or ICT skills acquired at work, languages learned and intercultural skills acquired during a stay in another country, ICT skills acquired outside work, skills acquired through volunteering, cultural activities, sports, youth work and through activities at home (e.g. taking care of a child).

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:

1. Identification through the dialogue of particular experiences of an individual;
2. Documentation to make visible the individual's experiences;
3. Formal assessment of these experiences; and
4. Certification of the results of the assessment which may lead to a partial or full qualification

After clarifying what RPL means and aims to, and the key concepts related to this process, the report will now describe the results of the desk research done by all the partners in the scope of the project's first activity of intellectual output 1.

Following the aim of the Project - to create an online toolkit targeting career guidance, recognition of prior learning and individual training support - this common report comprises 3 chapters: the first one dedicated to adult education and training; the second one focused on the state of art of RPL in each partner country; and finally a third chapter devoted to RPL national processes in practise.

## Chapter 1 - Adult Education and Training in the Partner Countries

The aim of the “Toolkit for RPL” project is to create an online toolkit targeting career guidance, recognition of prior learning and individual training support using the principles based on continuing education and training (CVET). The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CEDEFOP) defines CVET as a part of lifelong learning and it may comprise any kind of education (general, specialised or vocational, formal or non-formal, etc.). It is considered crucial for the employability of individuals<sup>2</sup>.

Before starting the presentation of the adult education systems, it is important to analyse the quantitative data related to the educational attainment level by age of the adult population of the concerned countries, as “the validation of learning outcomes, namely knowledge, skills, and competences acquired through non-formal and informal learning can play an important role in enhancing employability and mobility, as well as increasing motivation for lifelong learning, particularly in the case of the socio-economically disadvantaged or the low-qualified.”<sup>3</sup>

Population by educational attainment level by age (%) - main indicators:

### Less than primary, primary and lower education From 20 to 24 years

	2016	2017	2018
Bulgaria	15.0	14.2	13.8 (p)
Greece	8.8	7.6	6.3 (p)
Austria	10.5	12.6	12.2 (p)
Portugal	22.5	21.5	19.5 (p)
Turkey	43.9	42.8	41.8 (p)

Figure 1 (Source Eurostat)<sup>4</sup>

(p) provisional

<sup>2</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/4064_en.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council\\_Recommendation\\_on\\_the\\_validation\\_20\\_December\\_2012.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/Council_Recommendation_on_the_validation_20_December_2012.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

### Less than primary, primary and lower education From 25 to 64 years

	2016	2017	2018
Bulgaria	17.7	17.2	17.2 <sup>(p)</sup>
Greece	28.2	27.1	26.6 <sup>(p)</sup>
Austria	15.5	15.0	14.8 <sup>(p)</sup>
Portugal	53.1	52.0	50.9 <sup>(p)</sup>
Turkey	64.4	63.6	62.9 <sup>(p)</sup>

Figure 2 (Source Eurostat)<sup>5</sup>

(p) provisional

The analysis of the provided quantitative official data (figures 1 and 2) reveals that, although the existence of a small decreasing 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.

The first part of the desk research carried out by each partner country, concerned the adult and education systems. In brief:

In **Austria**, adult education holds an independent position in the educational system, both quantitatively and qualitatively. It furthermore comprises various actions, such as teaching, supervision of groups, counseling, guidance, education management, and library services. Adult education and training is less a "system" and more a "field" with many different structures. This field 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 as follows:

- NGOs (grassroots organizations and associations supported by public bodies);

<sup>5</sup> <http://appsso.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/nui/submitViewTableAction.do>

- Institutions run by the social partners (the Chambers of Commerce, Labour and Agriculture, and the trade unions);
- Institutions run by religious organizations;
- Public and private libraries;
- Institutions run by local authorities and municipalities (such as evening schools, the Federal Institute for Adult Education (*Bundesinstitut für Erwachsenenbildung* – BIFEB) and some community colleges);
- Commercial providers (companies and individuals/trainers);
- Companies which provide in-house training;
- Institutions run by the political parties;
- Institutions founded by the Labor Market Board (AMS).

The government and its institutions usually only subsidize adult education rather than provide it.

For the past 20 years, one of the main topics of adult education has been professionalisation. While providers of adult education can choose from a vast array of qualification offers, there is no standardised training course for professionals yet. The last years have seen strong efforts to increase professionalisation on an organisational level (e.g. *Ö-Cert* quality certificate for adult education providers) and on a personal level (*Weiterbildungsakademie* – Austrian Academy of Continuing Education, an institution which acknowledges and certifies competences of adult education professionals).

The types of adult education in Austria are:

- Academic education;
- Education for vocational, technical, and professional competence;
- Education for “self-fulfillment” (all kinds of liberal education programs: education in music, the arts, dance, theatre, literature, arts, and crafts, whether brief or long-term);
- Education for civic, political, and community competence;
- Remedial education: fundamental and literacy education.

On the other hand, the existing types of adult education training provisions are:

- Provision to Raise Achievement in Basic Skills;
- Provision to Achieve a Recognised Qualification during Adulthood;

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

In **Bulgaria**, specific measures are being implemented to build an adaptive adult education and training system. It 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.

An educational approach is in place that helps adults to continually develop as protagonists capable of coping with change and insecurity. Measures to be taken are related to the development of an educational environment that enables adults, regardless of their personal, social or economic situation, to acquire, enrich and develop their specific skills and key competences throughout their lives and their employability.

Efforts are being made to develop labour market-responsive education and training and to assume joint responsibility for the preparation and implementation of curricula, the improvement of career guidance practices as well as the provision of formal education and training, the informal training and self-learning through the introduction of a validation system for learning outcomes.

Among the main challenges is to encourage the acquisition by all citizens of universal key competences such as learning, initiative and entrepreneurship skills, cultural awareness, and soft skills such as teamwork, decision-making, conflict resolution, etc.

The institutional framework responsible for Adult education in Bulgaria is composed by:

- Ministry of education and science
  - Support of the adult training centres and monitoring the processes
- National Agency for vocational education and training
  - Support of the vocational training and adult centres
  - Monitoring and control of the process
- Ministry of labour and social policy
  - Organization of information campaign



- Employers organizations
  - An acquaintance of employees regarding “validation” and “recognition of prior learning” opportunities
- Trade unions
- An acquaintance of employers and citizens with the required information

Adult learning programs support the acquisition and continuous development of the nine key core competences for adult learning recognized by RPL processes in Bulgaria:

- Competences in the field of Bulgarian language;
- Communication skills in foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and core competences in the field of natural;
- Sciences and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning skills;
- Social and civic competences;
- Initiatives and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural awareness and creativity skills;
- Skills to support sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle.

In **Greece**, the “general adult education”, that includes all organised learning activities addressing adults and aims to enrich knowledge, development, and improvement of competences and skills, personality development of individual and active citizenship and mitigating the social and cultural inequalities ties, is provided by institutions of formal education or non-formal education. Informal self-directed learning is not included as it is regarded as informal learning. The vocational training is considered as aiming at carrier development. All forms of organized adult education are provided by the public, municipal or private institutions.

Greece does not have a long-standing tradition in providing non-formal education for adults. However, the EOPPEP - National Organisation for the Certification of Qualifications and Vocational Guidance, which is supervised by the Minister of Education, is the main administrative body of the National Network for Lifelong Learning. Furthermore, the Law 4115/2013 defines the responsibilities for the inspection and certification of qualifications which might be assigned to licensed bodies (like Lifelong Learning Centres, Private Schools, Foreign

Languages Schools), which receive authorisation by EOPPEP and which, following their authorisation, are placed under the supervision of the organisation.

From 2000 onwards, the implementation of new policies and initiatives, within a lifelong learning policy framework, covers different forms of education and training. The latter enable adults to develop and reorient their education on the basis of varying individual needs. Based on this context, the holistic concept of general adult education was introduced. It includes all organised learning activities addressed to adults that seek to:

- Enrich their knowledge;
- Develop abilities and skills;
- Grow their personality;
- Develop active citizenship.

A large number of institutions, fully or partly subsidised by the state, provide general adult education. At post-secondary and tertiary levels, the following vocational education and training (VET) options are available:

- 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.
  - Other training for employees and/or unemployed and other vulnerable groups.

In **Portugal**, adult education and training provisions are diversified and are oriented towards specific aims and target groups:

- Provision to raise achievement in basic skills:
  - Basic competences programme
- Portuguese for speakers of other languages
- Provision to achieve a recognised qualification during adulthood:
  - Adult education and training courses.
- Provision targeting the transition to the labour market
- Certified modular training
- Provision other adult education

- Senior Citizen Universities
- Other types of publicly subsidised for adult learners
  - Lifelong Learning: back to school education - recurrent education

Concerning the distribution of responsibilities, the National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) and the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP) are bodies with responsibilities in adult education and training.

The main adult education and training providers are the Qualification Centres, monitored by ANQEP, that are set up by public or private providers, such as public primary and secondary education school clusters or non-clustered schools, directly or partially managed vocational training centres from the network of the Institute for Employment and Vocational Training (IEFP), companies and associations or other bodies with significant territorial or sectorial importance and proven technical capacity regarding their sectors and end users, having been part of the contracted public network for at least five years.

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. Continuity of education and training policies in the Fundamental Law of Education was provided with basic individual training rights law in Turkey. Adult education is a right for individuals and responsibility for the state.

The non-formal education institutions that have an organisational structure all over Turkey offer the opportunity for learning outside of the school in different subjects for personal development. In many different fields, technical, and cultural training are offered to young people, schoolers, drop out students and adults in these centres. Courses are available free of charge.

The non-formal education fields in public education centres are:

- Literacy courses;
- Vocational-technical courses;
- Social-cultural courses;
- Social-cultural practices;

- Educational club studies.

Courses are organised in institutions operating under the General Directorate of Lifelong Learning related to adult education accepted as part of Lifelong Learning, such as:

- Public Education Centres' own buildings and facilities;
- Course locations provided in neighbourhoods and villages;
- In training rooms;
- In prisons;
- In hospitals;
- In public and private buildings;
- Buildings for formal education;
- Places provided by voluntary organisations;
- Vocational-Technical Courses;
- Skill Development;
- Profession Gaining;
- Social & Cultural Courses;
- Social and Cultural Practices.

Anyone at any age, education, social status, and cultural level can participate. Children under 18 can participate with the permission of the parents. Elementary school students can attend any course that they want in their free time outside the school hours. Foreign nationals may participate in activities with the permission of the governorship. When required, the specific age and level of education are sought according to the nature of the program to be implemented. This is announced by public education centres.

Public education centres organise courses with a realistic approach to those who require special education. With these courses they aim at making them active citizens, bringing them to society, acquiring knowledge and skills to facilitate their work, and participating in social activities. Persons with disabilities are taken into consideration in these courses. In order to evaluate the leisure time of the participants and to contribute to the family economy, courses for skill development are organized.

**Summarizing**, all partners provide adult education and training in their countries. The processes and the type of provision are necessarily different, but the main goal is the same, i.e., to provide the knowledge and the necessary skills for tackle the education and training and the

low skilled/low qualify situation of those adults, that for several and different reasons, left the initial education without completing the compulsory formal education. All countries educational systems follow, to a certain extent, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and other European policies in the scope of the strategy of Lifelong Learning which aims to “make lifelong learning and mobility a reality; improve the quality and efficiency of education and training; promote equity, social cohesion, and active citizenship; enhance creativity and innovation, including entrepreneurship, at all levels of education and training.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> [https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/education-and-training\\_en](https://ec.europa.eu/info/topics/education-and-training_en)

## Chapter 2 - State-of-the-art of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning

The Global Observatory of Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation of Non-formal and Informal Learning of UNESCO<sup>7</sup> defines Recognition, Validation and Accreditation (RVA) of non-formal and informal learning as one of the pillars of any lifelong learning policy.

The Observatory states that in the context of non-formal and informal learning the term “recognition” has several different meanings. In a general sense, it can mean the process of giving official status to competences (or learning outcomes) through the awarding of qualifications, equivalencies, credits, or the issuing of documents such as portfolios of competences. It can also refer to social recognition in terms of the acknowledgment of the value of skills and competences in the labour market or for academic entry or progression – sometimes called currency. It refers to the acceptance of the principle of recognition of non-formal and informal learning by national education, training, and employment stakeholders. There is no single, simple way that a country should approach the use of RVA in order to achieve the desired personal, social and economic impact. Rather, there are many examples of diverse, successful approaches to RVA that can be shared, discussed and developed in new ways to achieve a country’s goals.<sup>8</sup>

Considering the “Toolkit for RPL” partnership, we found several types and processes of RVA, that will be briefly described in this chapter.

For instance, in **Austria** competences acquired through informal means – e.g. at the workplace, in one’s free time or in the course of volunteer work – have not yet received sufficient attention or recognition. The concept of lifelong learning outside of institutionalized and formalized learning spaces has gained a significant degree of attention in Austria. The Austrian Academy of Continuing Education (*Weiterbildungsakademie Österreich* – WBA), launched in 2007, acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance and counseling as far as the acquisition of missing skills is concerned. WBA collaborates with all major adult education providers in Austria, sets standards in the form of a curriculum, and people can undergo a

<sup>7</sup> <http://uil.unesco.org/lifelong-learning/recognition-validation-accreditation>

<sup>8</sup> <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000233655>

process of validating their formally, non-formally and informally acquired competencies. The recognition is validated in a two-level process, graduates achieve the WBA-certificate and as a next step the WBA diploma. But 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.

Therefore, learners can submit competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proofs. These supporting documents are assessed on the basis of the WBA qualification profiles and then acknowledged. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. WBA graduates receive a recognised WBA certificate or diploma.

In **Bulgaria**, there is no national system for validation covering all educational sectors. So far, there are validation arrangements for general education and VET (as regulated by the corresponding legislative Acts), but not specifically for adult education. The adult training centres are following a similar approach to the one in general education and VET.

Validation arrangements including recognition of prior learning (RPL) currently exist in relation to general, vocational and adult education. Information and guidance on the benefits of, and opportunities for validation and RPL, as well as on the relevant procedures, are available to individuals and organisations and are free of charge. Disadvantaged groups, including individuals who are unemployed and those at risk of unemployment, benefit from validation and RPL arrangements predominantly in general education. For each registered unemployed person at the Employment Agency and its local sections, labour mediators (advisors) carry out an informal skills assessment as a matter of RPL (i.e. based on the personal profile, interviews and individual tests labour mediators identify competence gaps and prepare an individual action plan). The informal skills assessment could be used for the purposes of validation, however, the tools applied (assessment forms, interviews) should be developed in accordance with state educational standards.



The validation of non-formal and informal learning is supported by appropriate guidance and counseling and is readily accessible - for each person who has applied for a validation procedure, an individual consultant shall be allocated who assists the candidate throughout the validation process. The consultant is responsible for the preparation, completion, and delivery of a candidate's portfolio and personal information in the archives of the validation institution.

Legislative acts do not include specific provisions related to the development of the professional competences of staff involved in the validation process. Training is sometimes provided within specific projects. Individuals do not make great use of opportunities made available through validation. This can be explained with the fact that costs should be covered by the person undergoing a validation procedure (except in EU financed projects) or by employers who in general have little interest in getting involved in validation.

In **Greece**, there is not any specific nationally implemented system for recognition, validation, and accreditation of prior learning. However, there are some approaches that support the assessment of qualifications and classify them at certain levels.

An approach is the National Qualifications Framework (NQF), which is a coherent and comprehensive system describing and assessing higher education qualifications for streaming students into all educational levels and is implemented in Greece for the first time in 2010. The Ministry of Education, Research and Religious Affairs is responsible for supervising and coordinating its implementation by the EOPPEP.

Another approach is the certification of qualifications that concerns the certification of output; that is, the results of non-formal education, as well as informal learning. In co-operation with the labour market as for the priorities which need to be set, and in connection with the certification of input, EOPPEP. Finally, a third approach is the ECVET that is a system for the recognition, accumulation, and transfer of credits in the field of vocational education and training.

In **Portugal**, the New Opportunities Initiative was created and presented by the Portuguese government, at the end of 2005, with the objective to overcome the structural deficit in qualifications by making general schooling available to the population. The Qualifica Programme



is an initiative that aims to improve adult levels of qualifications and the employability of individuals by using a qualification strategy that includes various educational and training responses, tools and a broad network of operators.

One of the Government's priorities with the Qualifica Programme is to revitalise adult education and training as a cornerstone of the qualifications system, ensuring the continuity of lifelong learning policies and permanent improvement of learning processes and outcomes.

The strategy defined resided in four domains which has several goals, standing out for the matter of RPL the refining certification procedures including the processes involving the Validation and Certification of Competences.

Therefore, where the adult domain is concerned, an effort has been made to recognise, validate and certificate competences gained in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. And also to provide vocationally-oriented education, setting up the conditions have been set up for allowing the access and attendance of education and training courses.

In **Turkey** recognition and prioritisation procedures are carried out in 27 areas and 142 branches in Vocational Education Centres. Ülkemizde Mesleki açıdan Önceki Öğrenmelerin belgeye dönüştürülmesi temelde iki yolla yapılmaktadır. In Turkey, documenting of Prior Learning is basically done in two ways. Bunlardan bir tanesi Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı Mesleki ve Teknik Eğitim Genel Müdürlüğüne Bağlı olan Mesleki Eğitim Merkezleri, diğeri ise Mesleki Yeterlilik Kurumunun yetkilendirdiği Belgelendirme kuruluşlarıdır. One of these is the Vocational Training Centres affiliated to the General Directorate of Vocational and Technical Education of the Ministry of National Education and the other is the certification bodies authorized by the Vocational Qualification Authority.

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 with the SSI insurance breakdowns and other required documents. İlgili merkezde yapılacak değerlendirme sonucuna göre Kalfalık ve Ustalık sınavlarına doğrudan

girerek başarılı olmaları halinde kısa sürede belge sahibi olabilirler. According to the results of the evaluation to be made at the relevant centre, they can obtain a certificate in a short time if they are successful by entering directly into the Journeyman ship and Mastery exams. Bu işlemle, Milli Eğitim Bakanlığının 02.10.2017 tarihinde yayımladığı Önceki Öğrenmelerin Tanınması, Denklik Ve Ölçme Değerlendirme İşlemleri İle İlgili Usul ve Esaslara İlişkin Yönerge ile yapılmaktadır. This process is carried out according to Recognition of Prior Learning, Equivalence and Measurement Procedures and Procedures Related to Assessment Procedures published the Ministry of National Education.

The second way of evaluating and documenting prior learning is to enter the exam by applying to the Personnel Certification bodies authorized by the Vocational Qualification Authority. Candidates who wish to obtain a Professional Qualification Certificate apply to one of the authorized personnel certification bodies. As a result of measurement and evaluation by the authorized organization Professional Qualification Certificates are provided.

## Chapter 3 - Description of the recognition, validation and accreditation of prior learning process

According to the UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning Guidelines for RVA:<sup>9</sup>

Recognition, Validation, and Accreditation (RVA) of all forms of learning outcomes is a practice that makes visible and values the full range of competences (knowledge, skills, and attitudes) that individuals have obtained in various contexts, and through various means in different phases of their lives.

Recognition is a process of granting official status to learning outcomes and/or competences, which can lead to the acknowledgment of their value in society.

Validation is the confirmation by an officially approved body that learning outcomes or competences acquired by an individual have been assessed against reference points or standards through pre-defined assessment methodologies.

Accreditation is a process by which an officially approved body, on the basis of assessment of learning outcomes and/or competences according to different purposes and methods, awards qualifications (certificates, diplomas or titles), or grants equivalences, credit units or exemptions, or issues documents such as portfolios of competences. In some cases, the term accreditation applies to the evaluation of the quality of an institution or a programme as a whole.

On the other hand, the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning declares that: "the member states should, with a view to offering individuals the opportunity to demonstrate what they have learned outside of formal education and training — including through mobility experiences — and to make use of that learning for their careers and further learning, and with due regard for the principle of subsidiarity: have in place, no later than 2018, in accordance with national circumstances and specificities, and as they deem appropriate, arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning (...) include, as appropriate, the following

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<sup>9</sup> <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000216360>

elements in arrangements for the validation of non-formal and informal learning, whilst allowing each individual to take advantage of any of these, either separately or in combination, in accordance with his/her needs:

- (a) Identification of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- (b) Documentation of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- (c) Assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through non-formal and informal learning;
- (d) Certification of the results of the assessment of an individual's learning outcomes acquired through nonformal and informal learning in the form of qualification, or credits leading to a qualification, or in another form, as appropriate.”<sup>10</sup>

The European guidelines for validating non-formal and informal learning by CEDEFOP<sup>11</sup> also refers that: validation is also carried out by several institutions and stakeholders outside education and training: labour market authorities, economic sectors, enterprises, and voluntary organisations. The multiple outcomes of validation, ranging from formal qualifications to enterprise internal proofs of acquired competences, are all united through their efforts to increase the visibility and value of the learning taking place outside of classrooms.

To clarify the basic features of validation, the recommendation identifies four distinct phases: identification; documentation; assessment; and certification.

These phases are mixed and balanced in different ways, reflecting the particular purpose of each validation arrangement. When working towards a formal qualification, the robustness and credibility of the assessment stage are crucial. In other cases, for example in relation to voluntary work, more emphasis is given to identification and documentation, less to formal assessment and certification. However, the four phases are likely to be present in all validation arrangements. The purpose of validation is to produce proof of learning, potentially to be exchanged into future learning and/or work. This requires

<sup>10</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32012H1222(01)&from=EN)

<sup>11</sup> [http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3073\\_en.pdf](http://www.cedefop.europa.eu/files/3073_en.pdf)

identification, documentation, and assessment of the learning in question to refer to an agreed and transparent reference point or standard. In validation for formal qualifications, official standards used by the education and training system/institution will largely define the requirements of the validation process.

The Upskilling Pathways Initiative<sup>12</sup> (December 2016) recommends all member states to: “Where appropriate, base the design of the upskilling pathways on three steps: skills assessment; provision of a tailored, flexible and quality learning offer; and validation and recognition of skills acquired. Apply, where appropriate, to low-qualified adults the validation arrangements set up in accordance with the Council Recommendation of 20 December 2012 on the validation of non-formal and informal learning to identify, document, assess and/or certify existing skills.”

Concerning the partner's countries involved in this project, the RVA of prior learning processes are distinguished naturally by the different contexts. Thus, in this chapter we will briefly describe the RVA in each of them:

In **Austria**, the Austrian Academy of Continuing Education is a validation system for the qualification and recognition of adult education. Qualifications are recognized according to set standards based on qualification profiles. Launched in 2007 WBA acknowledges prior learning results and offers guidance and counseling as far as the acquisition of missing skills is concerned.

Learners can submit competences and practical experience acquired in various ways and with different types of proofs. These supporting documents are assessed on the basis of the WBA qualification profiles and then acknowledged. Lack of competences can be made up by attending further courses or by submitting further evidence. WBA graduates receive a recognised WBA certificate or diploma.

This process constitutes an important step towards the professionalization of Austrian adult education enabling those taking part in its certification process to obtain a certificate or diploma widely recognized within the profession.

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<sup>12</sup> [https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224\(01\)&from=EN](https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32016H1224(01)&from=EN)

WBA is supported by all ten major Austrian adult education umbrella organizations (called as KEBÖ-institutions) recognizes formally acquired competences as well as competences that have been obtained in non-formal or informal ways.

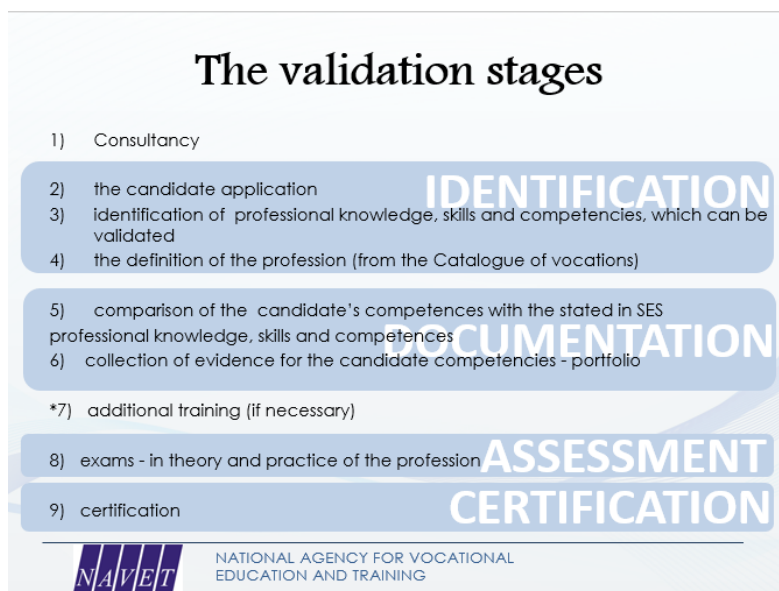
Prerequisites for RPL processes are a completed vocational education (eg. apprenticeship) or a school qualification, above compulsory secondary school level is required and hands-on experience in the sector must be proven.

The recognition process can be divided into three stages:

- Status quo evaluation: submission of relevant proofs to their online portfolio and send a copy via post to WBA. After approval by the accreditation board (called status-quo-evaluation), the candidate has an option for the certificate or end the recognition process.
- WBA certificate: candidates clarify with their personal advisor the requirements for a successful qualification as a certified professional have already been fulfilled and which is still missing. Thereafter an education plan is established. After a 3-day compulsory certification workshop, the competences of the candidates are assessed and WBA certificate is awarded and candidates have an option for the diploma.
- WBA diploma: candidates subsequently fill their competence gaps. In order to graduate with a diploma, candidates have to write a thesis that is project-based or related to their practical experience.
- The processes of recognition (WBA Certificate) are:
  - Portfolio work for identifying competences
  - Comparing competences with WBA curricula
  - Status quo evaluation
  - Guidance (but no courses provided)
  - Handing in of further proofs
  - Certification workshop
  - Degree

The average duration is 8 months.

In **Bulgaria** the validation has 9 stages as it can be verified in the following figure:



The labour offices of the National Employment Agency provide an informal skills assessment carried out by labour mediators. It aims to support labour market integration, self-development and/or educational progression.

The informal skills assessment forms part of the three-step process (i.e. Step 1, skills assessment/audit; Step 2, Learning offer; Step 3, validation and recognition), as described in the Upskilling Pathways Recommendation. However, in the Bulgarian context, validation may not necessarily be Step 3, but Step 2. For example, if after the skills assessment a person is re-directed to take on literacy courses and/or classes from basic education, the competences acquired have to be first validated before the person can proceed with further levels of education.

Apart from the labour offices, the Centres for Information and Vocational Guidance offer skills assessment in the context of career guidance.

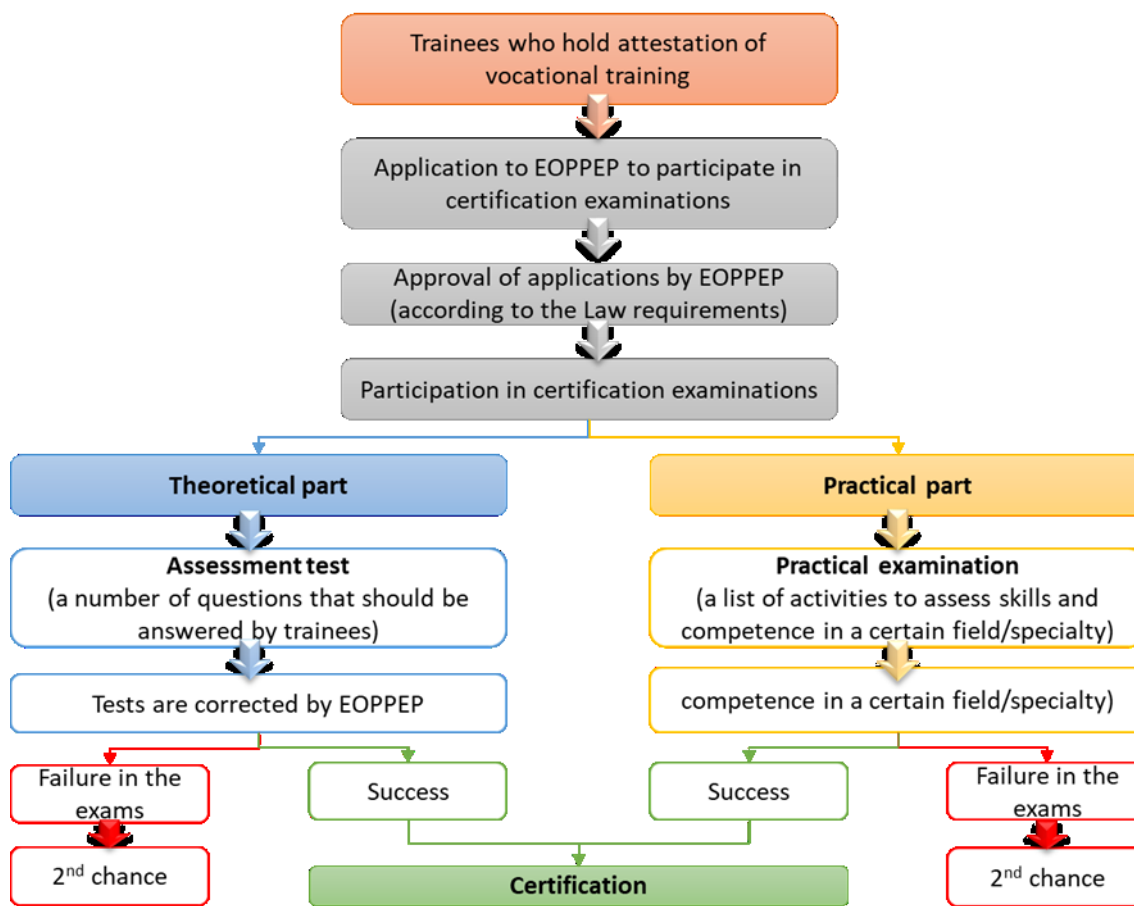


Adult learning programs support the acquisition and continuous development of the nine key core competences for adult learning recognized by RPL processes in Bulgaria:

- Competences in the field of Bulgarian language;
- Communication skills in foreign languages;
- Mathematical competence and core competences in the field of natural;
- Sciences and technology;
- Digital competence;
- Learning skills;
- Social and civic competences;
- Initiabiveness and entrepreneurship;
- Cultural awareness and creativity skills;
- Skills to support sustainable development and a healthy lifestyle.

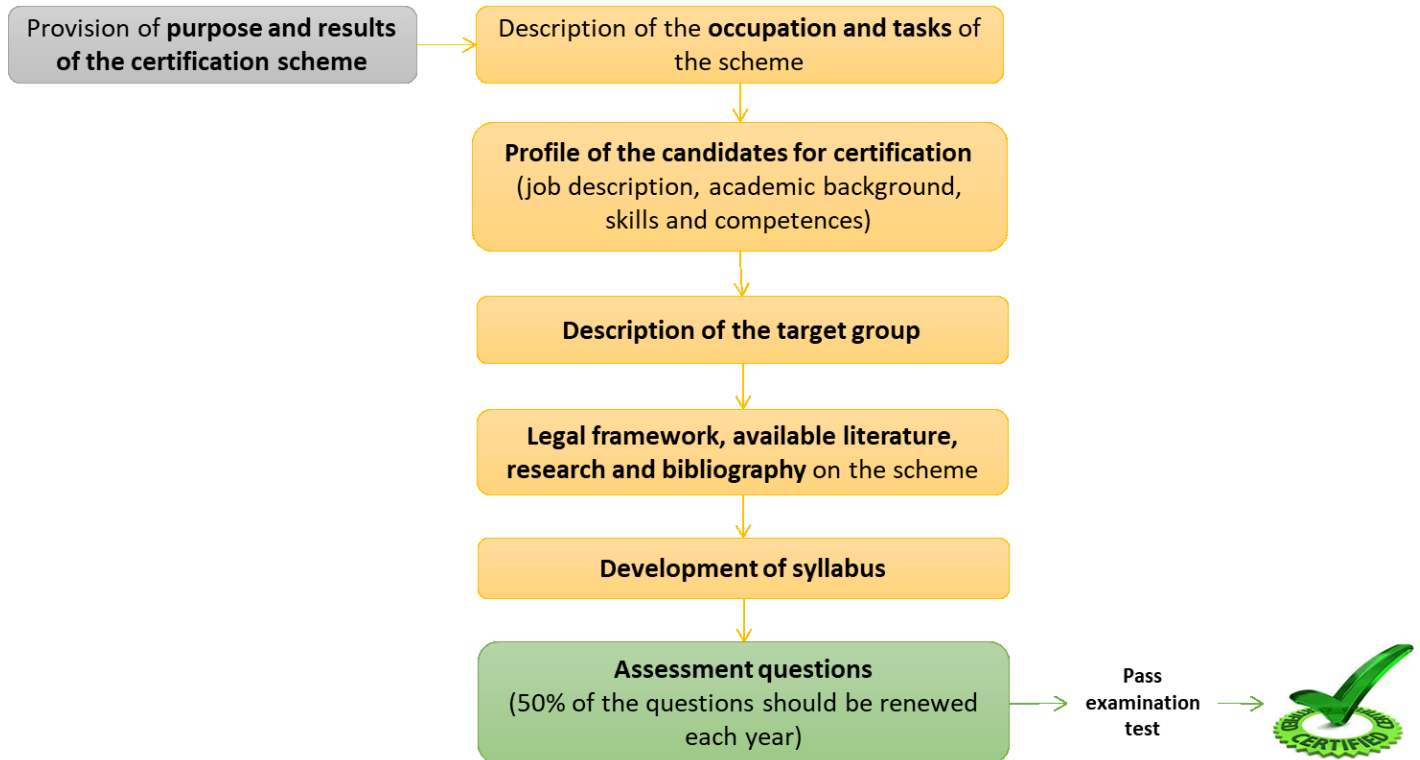
In **Greece** the RPL process concerns the Vocational training programmes offered by post-secondary VET schools IEK (EQF 5). Students who successfully complete all the semesters are awarded an attestation of vocational training. This attestation entitles them to take part in the (practical and theoretical) vocational training certification examinations conducted under the jurisdiction of EOPPEP, with which they acquire an upper secondary VET certificate. The process is described as given in the figure bellow:





The RPL process for training courses offered by LLL centres or other relevant bodies is differentiated from the previous one. These training courses provide certificates according to certification schemes developed according to ISO requirements. In this case, there are two options to accreditate a training course, either through certified bodies or through Hellenic Accreditation System (ESYD). The ESYD has been appointed as the National Accreditation Body of Greece. One of the accreditations that ESYD is providing is for Person Certification Bodies.

All the certification schemes are developed according to the requirements of ISO 17024:2012. The steps followed by this process are presented in the next figure:



In order to develop the certification scheme for the skills and competences of a profession by a certification body the following steps need to take place:

- Provision of the purpose and the results that we are expecting of the certification scheme that will be developed;
- An extensive description of the occupation and tasks of the scheme;
- The profile of the candidates for certification. The job description, academic background, skills and competences that a candidate should have in order to take part in the certification process;
- A description of the target group that the certification scheme will aim;
- The current legal framework, available literature, research and bibliography on the scheme as well as available international schemes and standards;
- Development and provision of the syllabus that the trainees have to study in order to develop their skill and competences and prepare for the certification procedure.

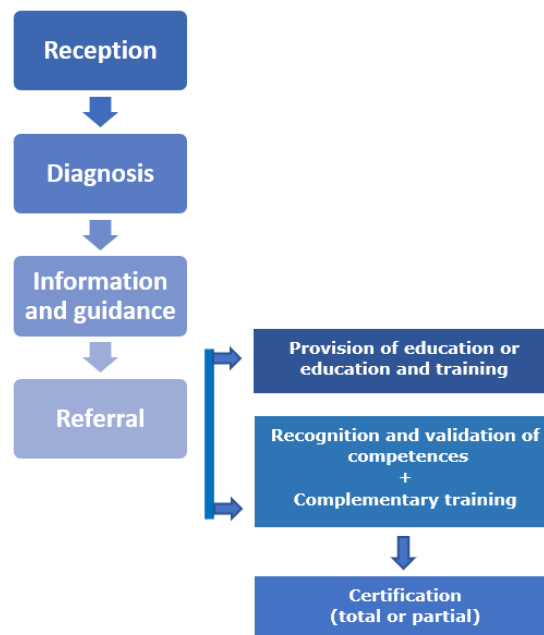
- Assessment questions (multiple choice, true/false, matching etc.). The assessment questions should be matched to each module of the syllabus and be divided into three different teams.

According to EOPPEP, the RPL of mainly technical staff and assistants is certified in 174 specialties.

In **Portugal**, the recognition, validation, and certification of competences process (RVCC) is part of the National Qualifications System. This process is based on a set of methodological assumptions (competences audit, autobiographical approach) that allow the identification, recognition, validation, and certification of previously acquired competences by adults throughout life in formal, informal and non-formal contexts. The process consists of the application of a set of assessment tools and activities, in order to build a portfolio (containing evidence and/or proof of competencies adult possess in relation to a particular framework).

The RVCC processes, developed in the Qualifica Centres, consist of the recognition of school and professional competences acquired by adults, throughout life, with a view to their certification.

Specifically, the Qualifica Centres ensure the following stages of intervention:



To gain access to the academic or professional RVCC processes (primary level - B1, B2, or B3 and upper secondary level), candidates must be aged 18 years or over, possess sufficient knowledge (professional, social, personal, etc.) in relation to the respective frameworks (key competence framework and the professional competence framework). To access RVCC processes, candidates of 23 and under must also submit proof of a minimum of three years of professional experience via a statement issued by the relevant social security office.

The conclusion of an academic RVCC process (with the validation of all the competences corresponding to a level of qualification) confers primary level certification (certificate of qualifications corresponding to the 1st, 2nd or 3rd cycle and a diploma, if concluding compulsory education - levels 1 and 2 of the NQF qualification) or the upper secondary level (qualification certificate corresponding to the NQF level 3) is completed.

The conclusion of a professional RVCC process generates one of the following situations:

If the candidate is able to certify all competence units deemed necessary to obtain a level 4 qualification (associated with dual certification), a Qualification Certificate with a record of all competences units certified, as well as a Diploma (fulfilling these two requirements, the certification of academic and professional qualifications can be the result of the RVCC process or the conclusion of the professional element when the candidate already has the corresponding academic qualifications) are issued;

If the candidate is able to certify all competences units deemed necessary to obtain professional certification but does not have the appropriate level of schooling, only a Certificate of Qualifications (which identifies the units of competency certified) is issued.

The processes of recognition, validation, and certification of school competences are based on the Key Competence Frameworks of Adult Education and Training for the basic and secondary level.

- Basic level: The areas of Key Competences are: 'Information and Communication Technologies', 'Mathematics for Life' and 'Language and Communication', Foreign Language (English and

French), 'Language and Communication', 'Citizenship and Employability'

- Secondary level: Areas of Key Competences: Citizenship and Professionalism; Society, Technology and Science; and Culture, Language, Communication.

The processes of recognition, validation, and certification of professional competences are based on the professional skills references that integrate 157 qualifications out of 311 qualifications available in the National Qualifications Catalogue.

In **Turkey** is also provided an opportunity for individuals who have knowledge and skills in any field but cannot certify it and wish to have any qualification of a formal degree, in order to advance in or change their professions.

The main institutions for RPL are:

- Ministry of Education
- Vocational Qualification Authority (VQA) (Law number: 5544; Started date: 21/9/2006)
- Universities
- NGOs (i.e., The Union of Chambers and Commodity Exchanges of Turkey (TOBB))

The knowledge and skills gained through non-formal and free learning will be evaluated. The awareness of individuals to be active and participatory citizens will be increased.

The admission requirements depend on the course type. For example, in the courses which include the stages of attainment (e.g. computer courses, foreign language courses), it is required for the participants to get the certificates of the previous stages. Generally speaking, the essential and basic requirement is to be literate.

Formal and non-formal vocational education programs will be continuously updated according to occupational standards. Responsible bodies ensure that qualifications required by the business world and society are described based on a "learning outcomes" approach achieved by the learners according to specific criteria. Responsible bodies primarily comprise of MoNE, Presidency of CoHE, higher education institutions and VQA; however, the legislation provides for

other responsible bodies as well. If the individual succeeds in achieving the learning outcomes of the qualifications following assessment and evaluation, education institutions and awarding bodies authorized by the responsible bodies take over responsibility for the certification of the qualification. Training institutions primarily comprise of education and training providers and schools under the MoNE, higher education institutions (universities, higher vocational schools and institutes etc.), while awarding bodies primarily comprise of VQA-authorized awarding bodies according to TS EN ISO/IEC 17024 accreditation. However, there are some other educational institutions and awarding bodies in Turkey and TQF implementation will include dedicated studies to determine such bodies.

The qualifications that are awarded at the end of formal and non-formal education by the public and private providers of education are divided into three main groups: general, vocational and non-formal qualifications. Currently, the Basic Education reflects different types of provision including non-formal programmes and programmes adapted for individuals with special educational needs. In the scope of Basic Education, diplomas exist that were provided in 2011 and previously. As of 2012, certificate of education replaces diploma upon completing primary school and junior high school; whereas at the end of twelve-year compulsory education pupils qualify for a diploma. General secondary education diploma is offered to reflect programmes of specialization in various fields of learning. Vocational and technical secondary education diploma is offered to reflect various programmes of education as well as programmes of vocational specialization. Diplomas are also provided upon completing secondary education programmes offering both general and vocational education. Depending on the programme completed, various types of certificates are provided at the end of non-formal education and training. Recognition of Previous Learning and the development of policies and programs are in progress.

Now, there are 280 vocational qualifications determined and only 81 sectors do not allow to work without a certificate. The recognition processes are developing increasingly in all sectors.

## Conclusions

After analysing the reports produced by each partner country and encompass the information in this common report, some final remarks are necessary.

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. Cases such as Turkey and Portugal deserve greater attention as the percentage of adults aged 25-64 low qualify are above 50%.

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. For instance, the European Qualification Framework or the European Agenda for Adult Learning (2011) or the Upskilling Pathways: New Opportunities for Adults (2016). The Upskilling Pathways is the key document for the next years. These strategies aim at the adoption by the various countries of common actions in the sense that all provide their populations with the same instruments and structures to enable them to achieve adequate personal and professional fulfillment.

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.

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 setting 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.<sup>13</sup> The Portuguese experience and system seem to be recognised as good practice in the European context, corresponding to 2012 Council Recommendation and therefore can be used as a reference for the next project steps.

### **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.
- 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.
- It is possible to obtain admission to some higher education institutions or to receive credits for prior learning within study programmes.
- The Austrian Integration Fund provides support and funding for formal recognition.

### **Bulgaria**

- There is no national system for validation of prior learning covering all educational sectors, RPL is most developed in the VET sector.
- The Centres for Information and Vocational Guidance may be a referral to validation as well as the Public Employment Agency.

<sup>13</sup> European inventory on validation of non-formal and informal learning – 2016 update Synthesis report, Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.



- The informal skills assessment forms part of the three-step process (skills assessment / audit; learning offer; validation and recognition), however, validation may not necessarily be step 3, but step 2.
- 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.
- Costs of the validation procedure can be covered either by individuals, companies, higher education institutions, or by programmes and projects financed by national, regional or EU funds.

### **Greece**

- There is not any specific nationally implemented system for recognition, validation, and accreditation of RPL. However, there are some approaches that support the assessment of qualifications and classify them at certain levels.
- 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.
- There are 3 approaches: a “translation” device in higher education that enables the comparison of different qualification; the certification of output, 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).
- The Greek government covers costs for validation of prior learning.

### **Portugal**

- The recognition, validation, and certification of competences process (RVCC) is part of the National Qualifications System and is developed in the Qualifica Centres.
- The National Agency for Qualification and Vocational Education and Training (ANQEP) 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 allow 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, leading to formal ECTS accreditation.
- RPL processes carried out by the Qualifica Centres are funded by the State. Higher education institutions have to allocate their own funding to validation processes. Additionally, they determine specific fees to be paid by learners for the validation and accreditation processes.

### **Turkey**

- A 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.
- 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. They mainly focus on motivating employees to improve their qualifications and obtain the Vocational Qualifications Authority (VQA) certification.
- The admission requirements depend on the course type. The essential and basic requirement is to be literate.
- The validation of non-formal and informal learning is still in a starting phase in higher education.
- The funding arrangements must involve the state, the individual and the organisation/institution.

This overview of the current situation of the prior learning recognition in the partners' countries enables us to proceed to the next steps within the project. Two structured matrixes for better understanding how to aggregate competences into qualifications (descriptions of the competences, knowledge and skills) and a career guidance toolkit for professionals will be useful. The main objectives are to understand how to design qualifications based on learning outcomes, how to describe occupational profiles, considering NQF qualification levels. These O1 tasks will enable the increase of knowledge about learning outcomes and their elaboration and application, which will culminate in the elaboration of a recognition of prior learning assessment module (O2). This will provide an overview of the main concepts, assumptions, principles, practices, logics, strategies and instruments of RPL, consolidated with the elaboration of documents/forms for prior learning recognition.

RPL project will then - within O3 - create a multilingual online toolkit web platform targeting career guidance, recognition of prior learning and individual training support based in the aggregation of competences into qualifications using learning outcome descriptions that have been worked in O1. The results of O2 will be piloted using the online platform.

Finally, an online consolidated assessment of individual competences portfolios (O4) will enable that each learning outcome, based on the O2 module, can be self-assessed by any individual searching for career guidance, using the online toolkit. It will enable that learning outcomes can be validated before requesting the validation of competences. This way the RPL practices will be promoted and the online toolkit provided in O3 will be piloted.